

## **I reincarnated into an otome game as a villainess with only destruction flags...**

### **01 – I remembered my previous life**

While getting carried away, I only stopped playing the game when dawn arrived... Sure enough, I barely got any sleep. I changed into my uniform, just splashed my face quickly with some water, and headed towards the front door without even combing my unkempt hair.

I heard my mother nagging “but all high school girls would be embarrassed to look like this” and smoothly pretended to listen.

After leaving the entrance I jumped onto my favorite bike from middle school and pedaled with full force. After reaching the street from my house and continuing downhill I let myself loose even more while pedaling. Turning the pedal even further, even further. Turning more, more. Turning turning turning... turning so much that I can’t stop. The bike continued this way to a street with a lot of traffic. In my fading consciousness... I heard the endlessly repeating voice of my family saying “this idiot!”

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These memories from my previous life... I just remembered them because my head was hit pretty hard. Katarina Claes, aged 8. As the only daughter of Duke Claes, I have been raised and pampered lovelily like a flower. As a result, I grew up to be a selfish, pompous princess.

Today, I was escorted to the royal palace by my father. Also, the third prince of the same age was scheduled to be guiding me around the royal palace gardens.

Meeting the prince for the first time, his blonde hair and blue eyes were so beautiful that it was like an angel's face. He was so calm and composed that you would not think he was only an eight year old child. I fell in love with such a prince at first sight, and single-mindedly stuck myself close to the prince. Since I was spoiled, I did not care about bothering others whatsoever. Then, since I was following the prince so closely, I finally got too close and fell on him. The falling momentum was not a big deal, but... the location was bad. There is an ornamental rock garden right before us, and I hit my head there strongly. I hit my forehead, and apparently it was spouting quite a large amount of blood. All of the prince's servants accompanying him were in a panic.

..... However, to me, something such as my blood flowing was no problem whatsoever. Anyhow, the shock had caused my previous life's memories to return. The previous me had been a seventeen year old high school student. This meant that in the current eight year old's memories and mind, seventeen years of memories came flooding in. Frankly speaking, I thought my head would short-circuit. The stunned me was taken to the infirmary for treatment just like that, and then deported to the mansion right after.

After that, I kept having feverish nightmares for the next five days.

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Five days later, somehow both the fever and the memories settled down, and I was finally able to get out from bed. Then, somehow to such a person as myself, the Prince has come to inquire as to my well-being. It seems that, the prince was concerned about me that could barely get up from my bed and visited my bedroom.

"Hello, how are you feeling now, Miss Claes?"

The third prince Jared gave me the honor of his angelic face and voice, I was lost on cloud nine. Ahhh, it's such a cute and lovely face...

Before the previous life's memories returned, Katarina just seemed to be in love with Prince Jared, but... The me that had regained seventeen years of memory would never entertain the idea of love with an eight year old boy. However, Prince Jared healed me just by being able to look at his adorable appearance of an angel. Onee-san seems to have involuntarily become something like a sister. Thinking there was no way, even while appreciating the thought, Prince Jared turned towards me with a clouded face.

"Really, I am so very sorry. To have injured your face..."

It seems that Prince Jared was bowing his head for some reason...

In the first place, it was because of my singlemindedly following closely that caused the fall, and because I caused bloodshed at the lovely royal palace garden... I said and truly felt "no, no, it is I who should be saying sorry." I replied in a hurry.

"Please, raise your head, Prince Jared. This incident, it is entirely my fault alone. Rather, since it is multiplied by the inconvenience to the castle people, I must go back to apologize to them."

And when I admirably lowered my head, the prince had an extremely surprised face.

Thinking about why that was so, I remembered that I was still a selfish princess when I met with the prince. By the way, these surprising features of mine after these five days were all the rage amongst our house servants. The princess that was raised like a flower was an arrogant princess even at home, and had always conducted herself arrogantly.

But, after regaining my memories of seventeen years as a commoner, I was unable to act as bossy and arrogant as I was previously... Now, the mansion is abuzz with rumors that the lady's personality has drastically changed due to hitting her head hard and being bedridden with a high fever.

Even the prince, who had only met me once before, was probably very surprised to see such a change from the original me.

However, the truly elite eight year old prince immediately recovered from his shock.

“No, if I had watched my surroundings just a bit more carefully... I wouldn’t have collided with you... thinking that it might scar your forehead, I am truly sorry.”

The small prince once again lowered his head deeply. He really is such a fine prince. Such a large difference from the selfish princess of Duke Claes’ family.

Sure, I was cut a little in this accident but it was nicely sewn up. A horizontal scar of about one centimeter will remain on my forehead. But I felt... it was just at the level of a one centimeter scar that remained. Although not a boast, I was quite rambunctious in my previous life. In elementary school I chased my two older brothers around the mountains. Therefore I constantly injured myself, and often had to get wounds sewn up. At first, my mother kept saying “but you’re a girl!” though by the end, she seems to have finally given up saying anything.

As such, a wound of this level was nothing to be worried about.

“No, no. Please don’t worry about such a scratch, Prince Jared. Anyways, the scar will be no problem at all because my bangs will hide it anyhow.”

After this, I returned a big smile to the concerned Prince Jared.

Then for some reason, the prince froze with an even more surprised face. Not only Prince Jared, but also his servants that accompanied him to the bedroom froze in surprise in unison.

Somehow there was an odd atmosphere in the air of my bedroom.

In such an atmosphere, the first to open his mouth was Prince Jared.

It's really wonderful to be eight years old. The myself that was mentally eight plus seventeen years old really needs to follow his example and act the right age.

"Well, even if you are not concerned about the scar yourself, it is not so in society. It might affect your future marriage prospects."

"Oh..."

I think while missing my reply.

Indeed, something like a one centimeter scar on the forehead would surely not affect any marriages in the previous world. However, this world's medieval European nobility-like society was rather backwards. In a world where political marriage is commonplace, even a little thing can become disadvantageous.

Noble society is really such a bother. Honestly speaking, it's rather melancholy, even if I don't have to make my social debut for a few years yet. When I was only Katarina, I thought entering adult society was a matter to be taken for granted. As I remember my previous life, it now seems to be extremely cumbersome and troublesome. To begin with, I roamed the hills like a monkey as an elementary student, and turned into an otaku girl as a middle schooler and mostly holed up in my room, it's impossible for someone like me to socialize...

Ahh, I want to go back to my previous life. I want to eat potato chips. There's manga that I still want to read. I want to watch anime. I want to play video games!

"rina-sama, Katarina-sama."

"Oh, yes?"

I was so lost in thinking about my previous life that I had completely forgotten about the prince. It seems that he had been trying really hard to talk to me, but I didn't hear anything. Prince, I'm sorry.

"So, you're sure such a thing is ok?"

“... Ye, yes, I understand.”

The adorable Prince Jared was looking at me with such a serious expression. Since I hadn't heard him at all, I returned his expression with a smile.

“Then, I shall come to pay my respects to you again once your physical condition has recovered.”

The prince said so while smiling and bowing, and the lovely and amazing Prince Jared then exited the bedroom.

Honestly I heard nothing of what he said, and while I was thinking of why he said he would come again to pay his respects... Well, I'll ask my servants that were also in the room later, for the time being I'll just see the prince off with a smile of my own.

And such, the prince's visit suddenly ended. For now, since it was tiring for a convalescing patient to have visitors, let me get some more sleep. Good ni-

“Ojou-sama! Congratulations!!!”

One of my maids, Anne, shook me awake just as I was about to go back to sleep. I really want to sleep... Anne, who was also in the room during Prince Jared's visit, was visibly excited for some strange reason. Her face was really red. I wonder what it could be, could it be that the prince's charm was too overwhelming? Without noticing my annoyed look, Anne continued excitedly.

“Even though Prince Jared is only the third prince, he's extremely talented. When our country's current king decides on his successor, it could very well possibly be Prince Jared. To become Prince Jared's fiancée, it is no dream to say ojou-sama could become the future queen. Congratulations on your engagement!”

Huh, what, uh, what?? I feel like I just heard some strange words. Who and who got engaged?

“Uhh... Anne, what did you just say? Could you say that again, please?”

“Yes! To become Prince Jared’s fiancée, it is no dream to say ojou-sama could become the future queen. Congratulations on your engagement, ojou-sama!”

“Who and who’s engagement did you say...”

“Whatever are you talking about, ojou-sama! Of course it’s Prince Jared and Katarina ojou-sama’s engagement!!”

“WHAT~~~~!!??”

My scream echoed in the mansion. Because of the head injury and fever, once again ojou-sama went and... or so it was whispered for a while.

## **02 – The engagement was decided**

For the time being, somehow I returned to sanity, and I heard the circumstances from Anne. That is to say, she told me what Prince Jared said that I completely missed hearing.

It seems that Prince Jared feels deeply responsible for causing this incident that left a permanent scar. As such, he felt that he had to take responsibility for the scar. And it would seem that his idea of taking responsibility = something like marrying me.

Oh dear, Prince Jared is only eight years old. It’s still much too early.

..... Even though I think this as the resident of another world, I also know that there’s no such thing as too early in this world. I also have eight years of memories from this world. Certainly, just half a year ago, Prince Jared’s older brother’s engagement had been announced while he was only ten years old. And just like that, the me of this world, Katarina Claes of the duke’s family, would have no problem marrying into the royal family due to my pedigree.

So, even though there's no problem in particular...

Being engaged to such an angelic prince, and maybe even later becoming a queen... For the other nobles' daughters, such an event would be just like a dream come true.

When my parents heard about this, they were extremely overjoyed.

But... as for me... honestly speaking, I could only think of this being extremely annoying.

I mean, even though I hate having to make a social debut so much... there's just no way around it.

Of all things, I got engaged to a prince, becoming something like a queen candidate... It's all so unexpected...

Ahh, I want to reject it even now... But, I can't tell the overjoyed family and servants something like "I really hate him..."

.....Sighhhhhh..... I'm really depressed.

At any rate, for such a trivial small wound such as this, furthermore it being completely my own fault, that Prince Jared would feel such responsibility as to consider marrying me...

I looked into a small hand mirror and sighed again. The mirror reflected the face of a depressed girl. My forehead scar seemed almost as if it was floating.

Compared to my previous life's average face like a tanuki, this face was a beauty's. However, my light blue eyes gave off a tight, sharp feeling... Speaking frankly, it left a strong impression.

If I smile and raise my thin lips slightly, it is the exact image of "the villainous girl." Moreover, on the inside was a monkey otaku girl. So, I don't think I can possibly be a good match for that beautiful and intelligent Prince Jared.

I sighed for the n-th time yet again today.



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Even though my parents still wanted to talk about various things, and were extremely restless, I found them really bothersome and told them “I still need to rest in order to recover my physical condition” in order to quickly get them out of my room.

The bed I was lying on was about three times better than the bed that the previous me had used.

Honestly speaking, just as I thought my five days of feverish nightmares had subsided, this visit from the prince... I didn't have the time to properly think about my previous life.

So, since I was finally alone, I began thinking about the previous life. The previous me was born as the third child of a regular salaryman and a part-timer housewife. Since I was the only daughter, I think I grew up very loved. I spent my elementary school years chasing around my two older brothers in the mountains. When I entered middle school I made otaku friends, and suddenly became an otaku myself. I spent my days buying manga, doujinshi, anime, DVDs, and games. In high school, at the recommendation of an otaku friend, I began dabbling in otome games.

Ahh, that reminds me, the otome game I had just bought, I hadn't beaten the game yet before my previous life ended...

I had just bought the latest otome game a few days before I lost control of my bicycle in that accident.

At my otaku friend's recommendation, the otome game I had bought had a medieval European setting as the backdrop for a magic school. I was pretty addicted to it, other than school, eating, and bathing, all my time was spent on the game.

That night I had been earnestly trying to get the happy end with the rather evil and sadistic prince, saving and loading new choices repeatedly... However, it wasn't going well... And before I had even noticed, the sun was already rising...

Ahh... why was I so excited? If only I had went to bed earlier... There's no use crying over spilled milk, those proverbs are really accurate.

Somehow or other, I cleared the smile of the super evil prince in the morning. At first glance, he looked like an orthodox prince out of a fairy tale, but on the inside was the configuration of an evil, sadistic person.

Since he could do everything perfectly, he spent every day bored no matter who he was with. In front of him, will appear an unprecedented, peppy and cheerful heroine that will whisk away his boredom. Starting with interest, and gradually turning to love – it's such a story.

Since this prince also had quite a perverted personality, he was unable to raise his popularity rating. Also, the rival character of this prince's route was quite troublesome.

She was the daughter of a duke that had been engaged to the prince since a young age. They had been engaged due to a scar the prince had caused on her in his childhood. Because of this scar, she considered the prince to be hers, and bound the prince to her, and she bullied the heroine and tried to tear their relationship apart.

However, the actual scar has already disappeared. And, the evil prince has already noticed it, but he left the matter alone for the time being in order to guard against other noble daughters' advances. However, the truth becomes increasingly obvious.

Anyways, this noble girl villainess did many amazing things to obstruct the heroine. Man, she was sooooo irritating.

.....Wait, I seem to have heard this story somewhere before.....

.....Because of the prince's fault in his childhood, getting engaged due to a wound on the forehead, the noble girl that bound the prince to her.....

The name of the mega sadistic prince in the game was certainly.....  
Prince Jared.....

Also, the name of the noble girl villainess was, uh..... the duke's daughter, Katarina Claes!?!?!?

I hurriedly got up from bed and looked at my face again with a hand mirror.

I saw the sharp face of the villainess. It's supposed to be an evil face... but, being something like evil... but, such a thing....

"You've gotta be kidding me~~~!?!?!?"

Today, a scream echoed throughout the mansion for a second time.

And as such, the Ojou-sama should be properly examined again by the doctor... so it was whispered.

### **03 – Strategy meeting**

For now, I need to make sure that this really is the world of that otome game. I can't prematurely decide that this is the game world just because the name and the setting seems to be the same!!

First off, I decided to write down as much as I could remember about the otome game.

The game I was playing right before I died was called "Fortune Lover" – it was set in a medieval European style country with swords and magic, with a magic school as the stage, an otome game about love and kingship.

In this world it is mostly the nobility that are born with the ability to use magic. While some commoners also have the ability, it is very rare. And, when a person with magic power reaches fifteen, in order to properly teach them how to use magic, they are sent to magic school.

The heroine was a commoner girl that was enrolled in magic school, an extremely rare presence. For the heroine that suddenly entered a school

entirely of nobles, with her bright and peppy nature, she will confront a variety of difficulties.

By the way, magic in this world is divided into “water, fire, earth, wind, and light.” Earth magic is the most common type, followed by wind, water, and fire. Light magic is the strongest of the five types, but only a handful have the ability to use it.

Of course, the heroine obviously had the ability to use light magic.

“The four capture targets”

One capture target was the third prince of the country that I captured the night before I died, Prince “Jared Stuart.” He is seemingly a blonde-haired, blue-eyed prince straight out of a fairy tale, but has a twisted, sadistic personality. He is a prince that can accomplish anything with little effort. He has no interest in anything and is eternally bored. He has had a fiancée (Katarina Claes, the duke’s daughter) from an early age. His magic type is fire.

The second capture target is the fourth prince, Prince Jared’s twin brother, “Alan Stuart.” He grew up to become rather perverted since he was always compared to and considered not as good as his older brother Jared. Even though they are twins, their appearances are different. He has beautiful yet wild silver hair and blue eyes. As the youngest child, he grew up quite spoiled. His magic type is water.

The third capture target is Katarina Claes’ stepbrother, “Keith Claes.” He was taken from a branch family due to his high magic talent, but he spent a lonely childhood due to his cold relationships with his stepsister and stepmother. As a result of growing up with a lack of affection, he developed an indecisive and fake character. His blue flax colored eyes were overflowing with sensuality. His magic type is earth.

The fourth capture target is Alan and Jared’s childhood friend, the son of the prime minister, “Nico Ascarot.” Although he is the most normal person among the four capture targets, his brazenness and untalkative

personality makes him difficult to approach. He has beautiful black hair and black eyes. His magic type is wind.

And now we come to the rival character.

The only daughter of Duke Claes, "Katarina Claes," a selfish, spoiled princess type. Because Prince Jared injured her during childhood, they had gotten engaged. Because of this scar, she considered the prince to be hers, and bound him to her. In addition, she didn't think highly of suddenly getting a stepbrother, and often bullied him. Her magic type is earth.

By the way, there is also a reverse harem route in this game.

And, as for the most important character to me, Katarina Claes' ingame behavior..... Of course in Prince Jared's route, and even in her stepbrother Keith's route, she was an extremely insufferable obstacle to the heroine. She's also this way in the reverse harem route. Anyways, she's such a hard-working villain!

Meanwhile, the hard-working villainess girl is...

If the heroine captures Prince Jared successfully, and gets the happy end – Katarina attacks the heroine with a knife in a fit of jealousy, and instead gets killed by Prince Jared. Prince Jared would rather protect the heroine than his fiancée, the duke's daughter... and sets off on a journey to other countries with the heroine.

By the way, in Keith's happy end or bad end, either Katarina gets exiled or dies...

..... What? Isn't this weird!?!? I get exiled in the happy end, and die in the bad end..... There's no happy end for Katarina Claes!?!? It's bad only!?!?

I tried to confirm the facts by jotting everything that I remembered down on paper. I gathered information on the country's nobility from my parents and our butler, and paid frequent visits to the library in order to examine the country's history and whatnot.

The doctor got called again to see me because I had disheveled hair and bloodshot eyes, but I categorically rejected seeing him because I did not have such spare time.

And the end result after a few days passed..... I had no choice but to admit defeat.....

After investigating, without leaving any room for doubt, I was convinced.....

I couldn't do anything but admit.....

That this was the world of the otome game "Fortune Lover....."

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I was finally convinced that this world was in fact "Fortune Lover," the otome game I was playing right before I died in my previous life.

However, just because I have admitted that it is does not mean that I have accepted the destruction end of Katarina Claes.

Honestly, whether it be being exiled, or of course being killed off, please spare me. To make matters worse, since I exited at an early age in my previous life, I want to be able to relax and pet a cat on my knee in old age!

So, it was decided that there would be a strategy meeting in order to avoid the destruction end.

Chairman Katarina Claes.

Representative Katarina Claes.

Secretary Katarina Claes.

I'm trying to think through this situation all on my own. After all, I have nobody to consult with.

If anything, whether it be consulting with the doctor or family servants, I would only be viewed with doubting eyes if I suddenly declared “this world is that of an otome game from my previous life!” If I made such a statement, I could even be forcibly taken away and institutionalized.

Well then, the first session of the Katarina Claes destruction end avoidance strategy meeting shall commence.

“Alright, does anyone have any good ideas?”

“Yes~.”

“Ok. Well then, please go ahead, Katarina Claes-san.”

“First of all, I think that we should break off the engagement to Prince Jared. Without it, there will be no destruction end in his route.”

“That is so, but... since the engagement was offered by the prince himself, can we break it off in a manner that won’t offend his family?”

“Yeah, that’s a problem.”

“Well then, how about if we don’t go to magic school? This way, won’t we never meet, or get involved with the heroine?”

“But, it’s mandatory for those with magic to attend magic school. Because Katarina has already displayed magic power at age five, it will be impossible no matter how much we beg father.”

“Urgh, all because of some shabby earth magic!”

“In the first place, wouldn’t it be fine if we just didn’t bully the heroine?”

“For sure, I agree!”

“But, in the game, Katarina’s entourage bullied the heroine together, what if we were considered the mastermind even without bullying?”

“It’s not even that, the fiance is that evil prince, in order to be with the heroine, there’s even the possibility of him getting rid of me!”

"Such a thing... then what on earth can we do?"

".....I don't want to be killed....."

".....If I get exiled to another country all by myself, I wouldn't know what to do....."

"For the time being, let's calm down. I have a good plan."

"You have a good idea??"

"First of all, just in case, we practice swordsmanship, in case we get killed by Prince Jared. If there is an emergency, we won't get done in easily, and can fight back!"

"Ahh, of course!"

"And, just in case we have to survive on our own if we get exiled, I suggest that we strengthen our magic!"

"How would we do that? In the first place, the only magic that Katarina can use is the shabby earth magic....."

"In other countries, magicians to begin with are rarely found. So, if we were decently skilled in any type of magic, even if we get exiled to another country, it would surely not be hard to find a job. And in the game, Katarina was just too busy being selfish and chasing Prince Jared, her grades were really poor!! She never practiced magic in the first place. So if we go all out, we should be able to at least use magic decently to some extent!"

"Oh, very true!"

"That sounds right!"

"Alright then, everyone. So our plan shall be to practice swordsmanship and magic extensively in the future."

"Okay~~~."



And as such, the first Katarina Claes destruction end avoidance strategy meeting was concluded.

If, there had been even one person other than Katarina Claes at this conference, maybe this conference would not have resulted in such an absurd conclusion. Unfortunately, with no other ideas, Katarina Claes would have no choice but to plunge ahead by herself..... What a pity, if only there was someone to accompany us.....

#### **04 - A destruction flag has come**

In accordance with the decision from the strategy meeting, I started some special training for swordsmanship and magic the very next day.

Of course, my parents thought it odd that I would suddenly want to improve my swordsmanship and magic, and looked at me dubiously, but I emphasized that "I want to be able to protect myself, and not get embarrassed when going to magic school in the future."

With an expression as if they were giving up, my parents consented. Their expressions looked a bit like my parents from my previous life, somehow or other it became a nostalgic mood.

And so I requested of my father with his empty eyes, for a swordsmanship teacher and a magic tutor, but...

We found a swordsmanship teacher right away, but magic tutors were so rare that they were difficult to come by.

So for the time being, in order to polish my magic, I'll just borrow books on magic from the library to read for now.

I turn to the first page of a thick book about magic open on top of my knee in the corner of a large garden. "First, in order to enhance magic power, interaction with oneself's source of magic power is important."

To begin with, swordsmanship aside, there was no such thing as magic in my previous world..... Therefore, I know absolutely nothing about magic in this world. Everything starts from zero.....

Interaction with oneself's source of magic power, eh.....

My magic type is earth, and that magic is very shabby.

By the way, the current magic that I can do is –

I can move the soil on the earth about two, three centimeters. Having this ability, will it be of any use?

Although honestly, the Katarina of the game did not use this ability to “move the soil on the ground about two or three centimeters.”

This “move the soil on the ground about two or three centimeters” magic..... since the name is too long, let's abbreviate it as “Earth Thud,” with this magic the game Katarina would not even be able to trip the heroine, trip the heroine, trip the heroine.....

Well, in short, I would not even be able to trip anyone with this “Earth Thud” magic.

Really it's such a shabby magic.

But, if in the end I can only use “Earth Thud,” I won't be able to survive the destruction end! I have to raise my magic power by any means possible!

But, I was unable to interact with the source of my own magic. Since my magic is earth, I wonder if I should talk with the soil.....

Talking with soil... talking with soil... to talk with the soil...

..... That's right!!!!

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“Uhh, Ojou-sama, whatever would you happen to be doing?”

The maid Anne asked me in a timid voice.

“What, I’m just plowing the soil!”

I cheerfully answered her as I was working while wearing clothes borrowed from the gardener. Starting today, I was making a field in a corner of the large garden of our mansion.

“Well, uhh, I thought that Ojou-sama was undertaking training to enhance magic power, why is Ojou-sama plowing the soil?”

“I’m just making a field and plowing the soil in order to enhance my magic power!”

“Ojou-sama, I am so very sorry, I’m afraid I do not understand...”

To Anne who was already making a doubtful face, after my cheerful reply she began making an even more dubious face.

“Well uh, it was on this magic book you see. It said that first of all in order to enhance magic power, interacting with oneself’s own source of magic power is important. So, the source of my magic is probably the earth! So, to interact with the earth, you should be making a field!”

In my previous life, since my mom’s family home was a farm, I was often borrowed during school vacations as part of the labor force. And, my grandmother used to say, “it is said that creating fields is our way of interacting with the earth.”

Gratefully remembering my grandmother’s teachings, I decided today to create a field in order to better interact with the earth.

Of course, I did check first with the gardener to see if it would be okay.

I borrowed a hoe and some work clothes and was all set. However, while I was talking with the gardener he just stared at me with the same kind of look in his eyes as my parents.

So, in order to prevent the destruction end, and to strengthen my magic, I worked hard at plowing the field.

“Interacting with the source of magic, interacting with the earth..... so that is creating a field..... I feel like you might have gotten something fundamentally wrong.....”

Somehow or other, Anne still seemed to be grumbling something under her breath, but I resumed tilling the ground with my hoe.

There’s still seven years left until I have to enroll in school. Not only “Earth Thud,” at a minimum, I have to at least get some magic that will be able to let me make some money for a living.

So in this way, I was plowing the field singlemindedly when...

Anne who was grumbling to herself under her breath, suddenly shouted as if she remembered something.

“AHH!! This is no time for Ojou-sama to be plowing a field!! Something big is happening! The prince... Prince Jared was looking for you in the mansion!!”

“...Eh... Why?”

I involuntarily dropped the hoe I was holding.

“Why Ojou-sama, isn’t it that he is coming over to give his greetings for the engagement!!”

“Ah, is that so.”

How dangerous, I had completely forgotten.

“Anyways, we can’t keep him waiting! Let’s hurry and get you ready to go back to the mansion!”

“Ye-, Yeah!”

Even for me I would not want to see the prince in my borrowed soil-covered work clothes. I needed to get back to the mansion in a hurry, but.....

It was too late..... Prince Jared who was tired of waiting inside had been guided to the garden by the servants.

However, the servants were all confused at being unable to find the target Ojou-sama in question.

It was unthinkable that the Ojou-sama that should have been training her magic was instead plowing a field in work clothes.

What should I do... Should I return to the mansion first and change my clothes before anyone finds out and then come back? As I was thinking along those lines.....

I met eyes with someone who realized who I was. This person has sensed from the beginning that I was badly surprised by everyone's arrival, and as such put on a lovely smile and came over to me.

"Well, isn't this Katarina Ojou-sama, whom I had heard was practicing magic in the garden, so I thought I would pay you a visit, what would you happen to be doing?"

The third prince, Jared, said so with that angelic smile appearing on his face. The previous me, had admired his smile for its adorable angelic quality, but..... now that I have realized that he is the evil sadistic prince from "Fortune Lover," this smile seems like the grin of the devil.

Moreover, while he appeared to be smiling, his reaction was something teasing like "what is this weird girl doing out here working in dirty clothes" as detected from his eyes, giving him the impression that there was no way he was just an adorable prince.

The family servants behind him were all frozen with their eyes glued to his retinue. Aren't they just all being blinded by perfection...

Rather, my father that had come with everyone had a face that seemed so pale green that he would likely faint. By the way, mother already seems to have been so stunned, that she was being supported by a servant.

There's probably no meaning in trying to smooth everything over while dressed in work clothes.

As for the frozen servants, and my parents since it had come to this, I decided not to mind any of it. I assumed a perfectly defiant attitude.

"Good day Prince Jared, I am so sorry to have troubled you to come all the way here to see me. In order to improve my magic power, I am currently interacting with the earth."

"Ohh, interacting with the earth?"

"Yes, I thought the best way to interact with the earth would be to make a field, and so I have been plowing the soil in order to make a field."

"..... in order to interact with the earth and making a field....."

To my cheerfully defiant answer, the Prince Jared that had been smiling up to now lowered his head. It appears that his shoulders are jiggling, slightly trembling. Uh-oh, did I say something to make him mad..... No way, I held my breath to see if I would get exiled before I had even entered school.

After a while, Prince Jared who was jiggling his shoulders raised his face. He is smiling. I'm relieved to see that he does not appear to be angry.

"So that was it, plowing a field is innovative training for magic strengthening. It was like that?"

Is it that innovative? Since I knew nothing about magic, I had no idea how to answer. I reply as vaguely as possible.

Suddenly, the prince walked right before me. Prince Jared slowly kneeled in front of me as he held my hand.

"Lady Katarina, I have to continue our talk from last time today, and have come to formally greet you for the matter of our engagement. I apologize for rudely requesting in such a place like this, but would you do me the honor of agreeing to our engagement?"

“.....Eh, ah, yes.”

With his flowing movements, Prince Jared unexpectedly stretched out my hand, and pressed his lips against my hand. Well, it was almost like a fairy tale scene..... But anyways, since I was wearing work clothes, the picture was not quite satisfactory.

I received a proposal from an angelic prince on his knees. If this had been any other noble daughter, or Katarina before recovering her memories, I’m sure she would have been dancing in the air with joy, but.....

As for me.....

My hand that was covered in dirt, against his mouth.....

I mean, isn’t it here that I should have said “someone like me is probably not worthy enough to be with the prince” and refuse him? Oh no! By accident, I just went along with the flow and said “yes.” Oh no, I can’t change it anymore. What should I do~.

Moreover, both my family servants and the prince’s servants were giving off this atmosphere of “congratulations.....”

I felt as if the prince in his sparkling aura didn’t even notice me in my dirty work clothes. The prince is really scary..... Moreover, father who just looked like he was about to fall over is now clapping. Oh, mother is still stunned.

Somehow, while not really understanding what was going on, I had officially become the third prince, Jared’s fiancée.

Anyways, I decided to just try harder at my sword and magic training tomorrow.

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Jared Stuart is my name. I was born in the delicate position of the third prince of this country. Since this country’s king is always nominated by

the previous king, there is a chance for me to become king as well. Honestly, I'm not interested in it at all. I feel like it would be extremely bothersome to do. To begin with, my two older brothers are both excellent, and they are strong rivals to each other in swordsmanship and studies, so they may as well just decide the matter of the throne between them.

By the way, I also have a younger twin brother. Although we are twins, his body has been weak since he was born, and since he was so sickly he was mostly raised by mother and a nanny, and we never spent much time together.

Although the third prince is in such circumstances, there's only matters about his older brothers and younger brother around him, Jared's presence in the royal palace is rather forgettable.

For swordsmanship and academics, by and large I learn it instantly as soon as I am taught. The tutor went overboard in his praise for me, but I just felt "so what." Since I also had to learn what people thought and how to read their expressions, I mastered appropriate flattery for each situation and putting on a perfect face and smile. Without any goals like my brothers, everything is too easy for me. Every day was very, very, boring.

While I was being bothered by my boredom, I got caught up in something really bothersome half a year ago.

My second brother got engaged when he was ten. Since my oldest brother had gotten engaged a year ago, that was probably the reason.

Well, the sudden engagements had nothing to do with me no matter how many there were. I thought it would have no relationship at all with me, but.....

Suddenly nobles swarmed around me in order to capture the third prince as a partner. In the royal palace, despite being almost forgotten, since I had been tactfully avoiding attention, the result was that I had left a good impression upon noble society. Thus, nobles with daughters



around my age were lined up here with fiancée candidates. Honestly, what a gigantic pain.

At this time, Duke Claes requested of me to be the guide for his daughter that was visiting the castle for the first time. This was something I had been doing often of late. If I really like his daughter, maybe she'll get lucky and become my fiancée, or something like that.

Since Duke Claes was quite a powerful nobleman, I couldn't afford to refuse him, and so the day in question arrived.

And so, upon meeting Lady Katarina Claes for the first time –

She was such an idiotic, spoiled selfish princess type. She stuck to me so closely, I felt so unlucky.

When she decided on her own to stick so close to me and to hit herself on the head I also felt she was really annoying.

Apparently, she would need stitches, and I was told it might even leave a permanent scar. I felt like it was completely her own fault and what she deserved. Well, that's what I was thinking when I went to go visit her.

Even though that's what I wanted to think –

"Because Lady Katarina Claes has a high fever and an injury caused by the prince, the prince has no choice but to take responsibility and get engaged to her."

Those were the words said to me by the messenger. Is that so, there was that strategy, eh.

Honestly, I was completely fed up with all the tricks of all my noble fiancée candidates. I wanted to quit and be rid of it all, but thinking about my ties to aristocracy, I cannot.

There are various factions amongst the nobility. Both my eldest brother and second brother have already started their own factions. If I got

engaged with a daughter from the elder brother faction, I would be resented by the second brother faction, and likewise if I got engaged with a member of the second brother faction, the elder brother faction would not stay quiet about it.

In this regard, Duke Claes has remained neutral until now, joining neither faction. And now, there's an excellent excuse of having to take responsibility for the injury I caused to his daughter. I can steal the neutral Duke Claes from the succession battle, making him my ally, but anyone looking into the surface of the matter would see that excellent excuse instead.

Although that girl herself is honestly extremely annoying, and her brains seem nearly nonexistent, at least I'll probably be able to decorate her well enough.

Thus, I decided to accept the engagement and take responsibility for the injury I caused to the duke's daughter, Katarina Claes.

Then, although I went to pay my respects to the recovering lady in question.....

"No, no. Please don't worry about such a scratch, Prince Jared. Anyways, the scar will be no problem at all because my bangs will hide it anyhow."

Lady Katarina said so absent-mindedly, and I was completely lost for words. What on earth is this girl talking about?

Well, for sure, for an ordinary girl, such a scratch is not a big deal, but it was a different story for the nobility.

I wonder what happened to the head of the spoiled brat that I had first met... Did the fever finish off what little there was of her brains?

However, to come here and change the plans to "let's not get engaged anymore" seemed like an even bigger bother, so.....

Even though Lady Katarina was clearly not listening to me at all, she somehow agreed to the engagement.

Besides, I had gotten a little interested in this girl named Katarina Claes. I felt like I wanted to get a little more involved with her.

And today, I visited her again to give my greetings and to confirm the engagement..... The person in question, Lady Katarina Claes, was standing around in a corner of the garden in peasant attire. I wanted to ask her what she was doing –

“In order to improve my magic power, I am currently interacting with the earth. I thought the best way to interact with the earth would be to make a field, and so I have been plowing the soil in order to make a field.”

She said so proudly. This girl is so hilarious, I was about to explode with laughter. In order to suppress my onset of laughter, I lowered my head, and when I raised it again I saw her light blue eyes staring straight at me.

I walked in front of Lady Katarina and knelt.

“Would you do me the honor of agreeing to our engagement?”

“.....Eh, ah, yes.”

Lady Katarina that seemed as if she had replied involuntarily, appeared to be rather bewildered and distressed. Her appearance was so funny that it almost caused another laughter attack.

A girl of the same age with slightly light blue eyes and tawny hair. I am now interested in a person for the first time since I was born.

I had a premonition that my boring days of being surrounded by boring people had ended.

## **05 – My stepbrother has arrived**

A few days after I accepted Prince Jared's formal engagement proposal, I was called by my father as I finished my sword practice. Lately people even stopped telling me to go to the doctor, so I wonder what it could be.

By the way, my sword practice is proceeding smoothly, I was told today as well "the sword's movement is great!" After this I just have to get more used somehow to the movements of a sword, so I was praised by my swordsmanship teacher. It seems that we have finally found a magic tutor as well, so everything is going well.

And at this rate, I can even surpass Prince Jared's swordsmanship brilliantly, or if I get exiled abroad, I could support myself and build a fortune with my magic prowess. Go me, I will defeat yet another destruction flag! I went to see my father while humming and skipping, in an excellent mood.

And so, I entered the room cheerfully, and.....

There was the assassin of another destruction flag waiting there.

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"It has been decided that Katarina is Prince Jared's fiancée, right? In that case, since there is nobody left to inherit for the Claes family, I have decided to adopt a child from another branch family."

There was a boy standing by himself behind my smiling father. He was probably about the same age as me.

It was like he was overwhelming this magnificent mansion, just his location alone pressured me awfully. Father encouraged the boy to step forward.

"My name is Keith. I have become your adopted stepbrother as of today. Katarina, please take care of me as my onee-san!"

He said so as he was walking towards me.

“I’m Keith. I’ll be in your care.”

I bowed hesitantly in this uncomfortable situation.

..... The second destruction flag has come ~~~~!!!

My happy mood disappeared instantly.

This might happen, well I knew it would happen someday, but it happened faster than I thought it would. No, this is too fast. I didn’t make any plans for you in the strategy meeting!!

Keith Claes. The adopted stepbrother of Katarina Claes, and as I know, one of the capture targets. He’s a man with a lot of sex appeal.

While I was dazed by the sudden situation, I saw my father indicating to me as if “you have to greet him too,” so I rushed to give a greeting back.

“I, I’m Ka, Katarina. I’ll be in your care.”

Keith bowed his head suddenly at my greeting.

The eight year old Keith, does not yet have the overflowing sex appeal from the game. I mean, it’s hard for an eight year old to have that much sultry sex appeal anyways. But, he really is a very pretty boy, truly worthy of being a capture target. With fluffy flaxen hair that is a little curly, I almost want to pet him on reflex. His perfectly round blue eyes are so cute, just like a squirrel.

In the first place, as the youngest in my previous life, I kinda wanted a younger brother or sister. When I was small, I asked my mom many times over for one, but she replied coldly, like pouring cold water over me, “it’s impossible.” So this time, I am delighted to have a little brother. If possible, as cute as possibly could be.

However, he is unfortunately a capture target for the heroine, and my second destruction flag.

I'm glad to have such a cute little brother. However, this child is my destruction flag...

Oo~~, I'm glad he's so cute, but the destruction... but I'm still glad to have a little brother.

"So he'll be living here as an adopted child. Katarina, Katarina, are you listening at all?"

"Uh, yes! Father! Of course I have been listening properly."

Without realizing it, it seems like my father has been saying something. Yikes, I didn't hear anything he said.

"And as such, since Keith is surely tired from having just moved today, he will be resting. Starting from tomorrow, take really good care of him."

Certainly, when looking more closely at his complexion, he seemed to be rather exhausted. The boy was then guided to the bedroom provided to him by father.

After sending off that tiny little back, I rushed to my room.

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When I returned to my room, I immediately pulled out a sheet of paper titled – "Previous life's game memories" that I had written. While trying to recall my previous life, I had written down all the information that I could remember.

I looked for the section on the capture target Keith Claes.

Keith Claes.

He had quite the lonely upbringing.

His father was a distant relative of the Claes family, while his mother was a prostitute. In total, he has been raised by three different fathers. However, his mother was looked down upon by the Claes family for having been a prostitute, and he himself was also harassed greatly by the family members. One time, while he was being bullied, he invoked magic for the first time. His powerful magic injured his tormentors, and he ran off.

Meanwhile, Duke Claes had heard about his powerful magic, and decided to adopt him as his son.

However, Keith wasn't ever truly accepted in the Claes house, either. His onee-san, Katarina, who had been a spoiled only child up until then, hated suddenly getting an adopted stepbrother. In addition, Duchess Claes misunderstood Keith to be an illegitimate child of Duke Claes, and her relationship with Duke Claes became icy.

Since he was disliked by both Katarina and the Duchess, even the servants were not able to do anything for him. Therefore, he mostly confined himself to his room and spent his time alone. And as if to fill the loneliness within him, he grew up to be quite the playboy.

Such a Keith met the heroine. At first he made a pass at the commoner heroine only because commoners were so rare for him to meet, but she was able to envelop him in such kindness that it gradually healed his loneliness, and he became attracted to her. And for the first time since he was born, he found someone he loved.

Meanwhile, in Keith's route, the hard-working villainess Katarina Claes was featured extensively. Getting close to the duke's family, the easy manner of exchanges with the heroine, the commoner enraged Katarina's noble consciousness, and she tormented the heroine endlessly.

If the heroine captures Keith successfully, and gets the happy end –

Just like the time with Prince Jared, since Katarina had been criminally harassing the couple, she was deprived of her status and exiled. After that, Keith left the Claes house, and married the heroine.

If the heroine fails to capture Keith, and gets the bad end –

Keith would be unable to protect the heroine from Katarina's harassment, and Katarina would inflict a deep wound on the heroine that would not disappear. In his despair, Keith would use his strong magic power to murder his onee-san Katarina, and then disappear.

Thus, when looking over the information about Keith, I sighed deeply.

There's no happy end here for Katarina Claes! Bad ones only! The only thing that changed was whether I died by a sword, or by magic.....

Even though she is so hard-working, there's only destruction ends, Katarina is pitiful too...

So, another destruction flag that I must defeat has risen up. I decided to enact a strategy meeting yet again.

Well then, the second session of the Katarina Claes destruction end avoidance strategy meeting shall commence.

"Alright, just like the first meeting, does anyone have any good ideas?"

"Yes~."

"Ok. Well then, please go ahead, Katarina Claes-san."

"Since this destruction end is basically the same one as Prince Jared's destruction ends, wouldn't it be fine if we just kept training in swordsmanship and magic as we are now?"

"But, in this destruction end, the sword has nothing to do with it. We got done in by magic. Since that's the case, we should practice magic even harder."



"However, the enemy this time has powerful magic. It was powerful enough to get him noticed and adopted from a branch family. For Katarina that only has "Earth Thud," no matter how hard we work at magic, it feels like an impossible hurdle to overcome....."

"Moreover, because the enemy this time is a relative, he could attack me at any time, and I always have to be on guard..."

"No way..... then whatever can we do!? Even though I thought I just managed to avoid Jared's destruction route!"

".....Man..... Since it has come to this, there's no choice but to..."

".....EH!? It couldn't be!?"

"It can't be helped, since it's so important to us, it's unavoidable....."

".....Such a thing....."

".....I have no other choice than to do it for my sake! Even though I really wanted a little brother, there's no choice! I'll pack up my feelings in a cardboard box and leave it under a bridge!"

"Ahh, no way! That seems so mean....."

".....But, like, there's no other way....."

"Uhh, sorry to interrupt during such an emotional time, but may I speak up?"

"Yes, what is it, Katarina Claes-san? Do you happen to have a better idea?"

"Yes. .... I mean, Keith fell in love with the heroine as a way to heal his loneliness, right? Then in that case, if Keith was never lonely to begin with, wouldn't he not fall in love with the heroine!?"

"!!??"

"If Keith never falls in love with the heroine, wouldn't that avoid the Katarina destruction end?"

"Su, such a wise suggestion! Katarina Claes! You're a genius!"

"Truly! Really! How wonderful!"

"So, let's make Keith not lonely. Will this be alright?"

"Yes, of course. ....However, whatever can we do to make him not lonely?"

"For the time being, so that he's not by himself, let's stay with him as much as possible?"

"And, now I can dote on my lovely little brother to my heart's content. This is something I also have to do for myself. I'm so happy."

"Well then, the destruction avoidance strategy for this time shall be to make Keith feel loved, yes?"

"Okay~~~"

And as such, the second Katarina Claes destruction end avoidance strategy meeting was concluded.

"This little brother is simply too unbelievably cute. How wonderful. I want to immediately invite him to play with me," said Katarina to herself as she went to sleep in an elated mood.

However, Katarina has forgotten something. Not only was it the game's Katarina, but also Katarina's mother that was lonely and treated Keith extremely badly.

## **06 - Interacting with my stepbrother**

The next day, when Keith came to have breakfast with us, he seemed to have rested well. I finished eating as quick as I could, and immediately invited Keith to come along with me.

“Since the weather is so great today, I’ll guide you around the garden. Since you went to rest immediately yesterday, you probably didn’t have a chance to look around.”

“Ah, yeah. Thank you very much, Katarina-sama.”

Keith is so polite and formal... I began sulking.

“Keith, because we have become siblings now, it’s fine to just call me nee-san. It’s also ok to not use honorifics or polite speech.”

“But..... that would be rude.....” Keith said very timidly.

“Man, since we’re siblings, it’s fine!! And for me, it’s my dream to be called nee-san. Please, I beg you to call me that!”

My eyes were glistening, and I was breathing hard. Keith had a very surprised face – then said somewhat awkwardly –

“I’ll be in your care, nee-san.” My brother is so cute. I’m in heaven.

And so, I led Keith to the garden, where there was a beautiful blue sky, with perfect weather for taking a walk. The Claes family garden was truly that of a duke’s. There was even a small stream and a pond.

“Oh, the small stream here has some fish. You can even do fishing.”

“.....Fishing...??”

Keith looked at the stream with a blank look on his face.

“Yeah, fishing. You’ve never done it before?”

“Yeah.”

“Then, let’s do it together! I’m quite good at it too!”

“We have fishing equipment?”

“Yep, then, I’ll be teaching Keith!”

I nodded proudly, while Keith showed off a very surprised face. Keith has only had this face for quite a while now. Well, although I haven’t had any practice since I became Katarina, I used to be able to fill buckets to the brim with carp and crayfish in my previous life. Of course, I was also able to fill buckets with fish in this world.

After the stream, I guided him to my field. Due to help from the gardener and the other servants, my field had become quite respectable. There were some sprouts from various vegetable seeds that I had planted. “These are eggplants, and these are tomatoes.” I introduced the various vegetables to him. The vegetables of this world seemed to be the same as the previous world.

“This field, nee-san made it?”

“Yep, at first I made it by myself..... but since it was too hard for an amateur working alone to develop it, now I also have the gardener and the family servants helping me. When we harvest it all, we promised to have a harvesting food party with everyone. By all means, let’s eat together then as well, Keith.”

If you look at Keith today, you might think that his face is permanently stuck like this – in a surprised position.

While looking at the adorable Keith with his mouth wide agape, I remembered his game settings. He spent most of his time confining himself to his room. I’m guessing that he probably never played out here much. I want to show more and more fun things to Keith.

“Keith, next I’ll take you to my favorite place.”

I grabbed Keith’s arm and began to walk quickly.

“Here’s my favorite place.”

I point at a large tree at the edge of the garden. The tallest tree in the Claes garden is now my favorite place to be. I can read a book leaning against it, and it’s also a great place to take a nap in the shade. And, best of all –

“You can get an amazing view of the scenery if you climb this tree.”

Yep, since this tree is the tallest one in the garden, you can see the entire garden as well as enjoying a nice view. Katarina before recovering her memories, had never climbed a tree before, but I am different, as if my monkey blood was calling out to me, I had no choice but to climb it. I quickly marked the tree as my own, and was always conquering it in between working on the field.

“You climb trees?”

“Yes, tree climbing. Have you done it before, Keith?”

Keith’s mouth was once again wide agape and he shook his head in a “never” motion.

“Well then, I’ll just teach you. First, start off by watching me climb, ok?”

As I said so, I took off my shoes, rolled up my dress, and began climbing the tree. Since I was wearing a dress today and not the usual work clothes, it was more difficult than usual to move around in, but I still slithered up pretty quickly. In my previous life, there were rumors about huge monkeys on the mountain we played on... Since my family was pretty embarrassed about it, they told me to stop over and over.....

I climbed the tree smoothly.

I gradually let myself loose and increased my pace.

I climbed the tree smoothly, smoothly.

For me, that was called a genius of tree climbing, there was only one flaw. It's that I would always get carried away. Both my parents and teachers told me to be careful. In the first place, the reason I died in the previous world seems to be something similar... And even after reincarnating, unfortunately, it appears that my bad habit was not cured.

Around the middle of the tree, getting rather carried away, I waved at Keith with a big smile on my face. As I hummed, I was getting more carried away and stirred up. As a result, I lost my balance, and fell out of the tree.

While I was falling, as if in slow motion, I remembered my family calling me "this idiot!" as I was dying in my previous life.

I fell butt-first onto the ground with a loud thud. I was mentally prepared to be quite injured, having fell from such a height, but..... Huh? It barely even hurts. I must be quite sturdy. Moreover, I felt like the ground below me was really soft for some reason. And when I looked under me.....

"Ke, Keith!?!?"

Isn't that my lovely brother underneath my butt!? Moreover, he is limp and collapsed with my butt on his back.

"No~~! Keith please don't die~~ even though I had just gotten such a cute brother~~~"

I was crying while holding the limp Keith's arm. This must surely be the punishment for even thinking about abandoning my feelings for him in a box under a bridge..... No way, for my cute little brother to die because of my butt..... I cried a lot of tears and my nose became runny~~

"Keith, please don't die~~~"

"Um, nee-san?"

“Please don’t die ~~~ No way, to have killed my younger brother with my butt..... Keith~~”

“Um, nee-san? Are you listening?”

“Please don’t die ~~ Keith ~”

“KATARINA NEE-SAN!”

Suddenly, when I looked at Keith who had suddenly shouted while I was clinging to him, I met his clear, bright blue eyes.

“Keith!? You’re alive, right!?!”

I was so moved that I hugged him strongly, Keith seemed to harden a bit in my arms.

“Oh no, Keith, does it hurt anywhere??”

“Just a little, it’s okay because I only hit my back.”

Even though Keith said this while smiling, he still seemed a little strange. Surely, he must be angry at me.

“Keith, wait a little bit for me here, ok? I’ll run right away to the mansion and get some servants to carry you back.”

Since I was a commoner in my previous life, I had never really gotten used to having servants, but to think that I would have need of them in a place like this today..... Leaving Keith behind since he seemed to be alright for now, I dashed towards the mansion.

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Keith’s back was just a little red, luckily it wasn’t a big deal. Although it became red, it’s something that will heal really soon.

Even though I prostrated myself before Keith and apologized, but my angelic little brother only said “it’s good if nee-san isn’t injured.” His kindness almost had me crying again.

And so I was forgiven by Keith, and my father and the family servants earnestly warned me to be more careful in my movements from now on, and everything ended. .... That’s what I thought, but.....

After finishing dinner, while lying down on my bed in my room, for some reason I was called by my mother. Honestly, since she had been avoiding me since the engagement to the prince in the field incident, I wondered what she could want. For the time being, I asked Anne to tidy up my unkempt hair, then headed to the room my mother was in.

While walking towards the room, I suddenly remembered. Come to think of it, in the game, Katarina’s mother, Duchess Claes, was also pretty hard on Keith. She had misunderstood Keith to be an illegitimate child.

Indeed, I had heard such a rumor around the mansion from the servants when Keith was brought to the mansion. Keith’s blue eyes are very similar to father’s.

Duchess Claes, also known as Miri Diana, and her marriage to Duke Luigi Claes was not a marriage of love. That’s not uncommon amongst the nobility, but.....

Even though Luigi Claes is now just a no-good middle-aged man madly doting on his only daughter, he used to be quite the ladies’ man back in the day. The number of women that wanted to get married to him were as numerous as the stars.

Miri Diana is the second daughter of Duke Ades, a family of equal standing to the Claes family, with tight, upturned eyes that caused her to be a little shy, their marriage was something that was decided for them. As Duke Ades asked Luigi Claes to take care of Miri Diana, Luigi was obligated to marry her when Duke Ades passed away.



It was as if the couple was both wearing masks, although not to the point where they hated each other, but Katarina felt as if they were unfriendly. That's why, when looking at the young Keith and his eyes that were so similar to my father's, it was whispered that Keith was the child of one of the master's mistresses. Well, starting from this afternoon, rumors that "Ojou-sama has done it again," have wiped away the previous rumors.....

With such rumors flying around, I know that Keith is not father's illegitimate child due to my knowledge of the game, but my mother does not have that benefit. For both Keith and my mother's benefit, I have to let her know that he is not the child of a mistress.

In this way, I arrived at the room my mother was in while thinking about many things.

When I entered the room, for some reason, father and Keith were both present as well. Eh, what, what's this!? While I was being flustered about not knowing what the situation was, I looked at my father, but he returned my look with one that said he also had no idea what was going on. Of course, Keith also looked as if he didn't know what was going on, and had his head lowered silently in this unnecessarily large room.

Meanwhile, in this indescribable atmosphere, the reason for calling all of us here, mother opened her mouth.

"My husband, Keith-san, Katarina, I have something important to say."

To me, it seemed as if mother had a grave expression on her face.

"Exactly what is it so suddenly, Miri Diana?"

Mother's grave atmosphere caused father to also have a stiff expression.

While staring profoundly into my father's eyes, mother deeply lowered her head.

"Please find your own happiness and divorce me."

“ .....

This sudden remark caused everyone, from my father and of course me and Keith, to the servants in the room, to be at a loss for words.

In front of us that were rooted in place, mother spoke –

“Regardless of you having married me despite my rather high age for marriage, my only daughter turned out this way..... moreover, having given your all-important son Keith such an injury..... I am deeply sorry. I will bring this helpless daughter of mine with me to my parents’ home. My husband, please find happiness with Keith-san and his mother.”

My mother said so as her eyes filled with tears.

Meaning, mother is saying, you should divorce me, and be happy with Keith and the mistress that is Keith’s mother. Well, actually, there is no such mistress, but..... Even so, my mother said in front of the person in question “a helpless daughter.....” Well, I was often told so as well by my previous parents.....

The atmosphere in the room was like that of a raging snowstorm, there is no saying what could happen. Meanwhile, in that sort of atmosphere, my brave father opened his mouth.

“What are you talking about, Miri Diana? The matter of Keith aside, who exactly, is his mother?”

“You don’t have to hide it anymore, I already know that Keith-san is my husband’s child with a mistress. By all rights, you should marry her, and I will take this helpless daughter of mine and disappear immediately. I wish my husband the utmost happiness with the person he loves..... And as such, Katarina, please immediately make preparations to leave.”

My mother said so while spilling over with tears, and it felt as if she were about to dash out of this mansion this very instant. Moreover, without fail she was also going to take the “helpless daughter” back with her.

Sure, mother seemed to think that Keith was a mistress's child, but..... No way, being cornered like this..... As such, my incident where I fell from the tree onto Keith seems to have been the straw that broke the camel's back.

Surely they won't divorce just like this..... Everyone in the room was frozen and just looking at each other.

Without noticing it, somehow my father had moved next to my mother and resting his hand gently on her shoulder. And, he had a terribly sad face. Somehow or other, it seems as if he's about to cry. Well, it's natural since he has been suspected of a nonexistent affair, and is being asked for a divorce.

"My husband."

Mother looked up at father with tears in her eyes.

"Miri Diana, when we got married, you didn't realize that it was me pulling the strings all along?"

"Even though there were so many other suitable candidates..... I know that you only married me out of obligation to my father, Duke Ades. I'm very sorry about that....."

As she was saying that, she was suddenly hugged by my father while her head was hanging down. Eh, what's this development? The entire room of people, including me, just watched them while stunned.

"Miri Diana, so that's what you've been thinking. I'm sorry that I wasn't aware of any of this. Because I was unable to properly tell you my feelings, I have done you a great injustice. Miri Diana, let me say that I love you again."

"My, my husband..."

"When I was first introduced to you by Duke Ades, I fell in love at first sight. When I heard that Duke Ades had not decided your marriage yet, I was happy enough to ascend to heaven, and decided to forcibly make

it so that I could marry you. But, after that, I always thought that you hated me because we were obligated to get married.....”

“.....No, I was also attracted to you at first sight. But..... I thought since we were obligated to get married that you would hate me.....”

“Miri Diana, it’s simply that we misunderstood each other.”

“My husband...”

The bloodbath of the divorce had begun turning into a love play. Mother and father are now in a state where they can only see each other, looking only into each other’s sweet faces.

Keith, the other servants, and I could only stand around doing nothing except having our mouths agape. However, the love play between my parents was continuing on.....

“Ojou-sama, and young master. Since it’s almost time to rest, let’s return to our rooms.”

We were locked out of the room by a faithful servant-san.

Of course all the other servants withdrew as well, while the love play between those two people will probably develop even further now that they are alone.

For a while, I just stood around outside the room, but returned to my room at the demand of a servant.

Before returning, I told Keith “it’s been a long day, good night” and Keith also returned to his room while saying “good night, nee-san” with a somewhat complicated face.

Ugh. I was so tired in vain.

In the first place, my father always praises this villainous face of mine endlessly to mother as “my angel, the world’s cutest,” I’m sure this face must look very beautiful. My father is a traditionalist when it comes to beauty I guess..... Everyone has different preferences.

But, this should also solve the misunderstanding about Keith being a mistress's child, and as such she shouldn't be so hard on Keith.

In particular, this problem had been solved without me doing anything.

In this way, my needlessly long day has finally ended.

## **07 – My stepbrother's magic is quite powerful**

Several weeks have passed since the incidents where I fell onto Keith from the tree and the divorce crisis.

After the incidents, daily life has been calm. The magic tutor has been decided, and full-fledged magic training will finally start in a few days. My stepbrother Keith has also been getting more familiar with the family, he seems to have become tamer.

If there's any problems, it's that occasionally the evil sadistic Prince Jared, using the engagement as a reason, has begun showing up here from time to time. Somehow, he heard about my tree incident, and came to visit me to express his regards.

However, I told him I really wasn't injured to the point where I needed visits. Because my brother was underneath me, I was basically uninjured. And yet, it's so mortifying to think that I couldn't even climb a tree when I had so much monkey blood in me..... I only fell from the tree because I had gotten careless and carried away, but I'm actually still pretty good at climbing trees!!! However, during my hot-blooded passionate narrative, since Prince Jared spent the whole time with his face down and his shoulders trembling, I wasn't sure if he was actually properly listening to me.

By the way, ever since my parents overcame their divorce crisis, I'm now so embarrassed for them as a daughter, because they've become so lovey-dovey. Man, it's like they're lost in their own little world. At this

rate I feel like I may be getting another little brother or sister soon. And sorry but honestly, I wish they would hurry up and calm down.

Then, while mother had been cold to Keith in the game..... Now that she has confirmed her husband's love and become lovey-dovey, seeing how Keith looked like her husband, said "Keith will surely grow up to be splendid just like my husband" and started doting on him as well. But, her real daughter is feeling left out..... Now, as for my father who usually doted on me, after his newfound love, is now saying "Katarina is similar to Miri Diana, the world's cutest" instead.....

In this way, the Claes family that had been rather awkward in the game, had somehow completely become a lovey-dovey family.

After I finished practicing the sword with Keith, we came to the field together. My cute stepbrother seems not only to be cute and friendly, but also talented in swordsmanship, and was praised by our swordsmanship teacher today. As the older sister, I'm really proud of him. As for me, I was praised like usual for my sword swings. After that it was just exercising.

The field's crops are becoming steadily bigger.

"Come to think of it, why did nee-san make a field in the first place?"

Keith asked me as he was looking at the cucumber sprouts that had gotten quite large.

"Come to think of it, I never did tell Keith the reason, eh."

I explained to Keith how in order to strengthen my magic, interacting with oneself's source of magic was important, and that making a field was my way of interacting with the earth. Well, as for now, I had mostly forgotten about strengthening my magic, and it had turned into my hobby instead.

"Making a field can strengthen magic..... I think something is wrong here....."

Keith opened his mouth wide agape when he heard the story, and was grumbling something under his breath to himself. Hmm, somehow I feel like I've seen a similar scene somewhere before.

"Come to think of it, Keith has some pretty strong magic, right? What can you do?"

After all, since Keith was recognized for his strong magic, he was adopted into the Claes family. Surely he has a power that is incomparable to that of my "Earth Thud." When I looked at Keith with a face full of interest, for some reason he had a stiff face.

"Keith, is something wrong?"

"Nothing, it's fine."

Sneaking a quick peek at Keith, his tiny neck was shaking.

"Oh yeah, as for me, well, I can only do this."

And so I showed off my ultimate skill, Earth Thud. Keith smiled.

"It's rather small, isn't it."

"Yep, it's quite little. Even though I want to be able to create a wall of earth with a bang, or manipulate an earth golem or something....."

As I said so, I got a bit downhearted.

"An earth golem?" Keith repeated.

"Yeah, that's right! I want to be able to manipulate an earth golem!"

I recalled that there was a scene in the game where Keith, with his earth magic, was able to control an earth golem and come to the rescue of the heroine. If I can control an earth golem, that means I can get free labor. It

will surely be good for business. If I get exiled, I'll have my earth golem create a fortune for me.

"Even though I really want to try it, I have no idea how. That's right! If it's Keith, surely you know some way!"

After all, Keith used this magic in the game.

".....Uh... But....."

"Please! Keith. Even just a little! Let me see it!"

Although Keith seemed terribly hesitant for some reason, I absolutely, even if just a little bit, insisted on asking him to show me.

".....Fine, just a little....."

He acknowledged me reluctantly.

"Yay~~ Thank you, Keith!"

Yay~~! Now, I can start a business with magic!! I'll be able to avoid the destruction~~! Or, it might even make Katarina into a business mogul! I was so happy that I even started dancing a bit.

Keith had apparently played with clay dolls before at his previous house. And, since his magic activated it, it seems that his magic entered the clay doll and gave it the ability to move.

Keith made a miniature golem of about ten centimeters from the garden soil. What a stepbrother, he seems so dexterous with his hands. And then, he put both hands on the golem and slowly closed his eyes. After a while, Keith opened his eyes and the golem began walking with a soft pitter-patter.

"W-, Wow!! Keith. It's moving! The golem is moving!!"

"If I put magic power into the earth golem like this, it can move where I want it to."



Keith explained to me while I was squealing in excitement.

“Are they all this size?”

In the game, it was supposed to be large enough to be able to embrace the heroine.

“If I put more magic power into it, it should be able to grow bigger... wanna see?”

While my eyes were full of expectations, Keith had a troubled face. I nodded wildly. I mean, he shouldn't be limited to just the size of ten centimeters. In order to increase business, of course a much bigger golem with an impact was needed. Keith looked at me with very troubled eyes. However, when he saw how full of expectation I was, once again, he placed both hands on the golem.

Then, the ten centimeter sized golem suddenly grew to about three meters. I was instinctively thrilled.

“This is really amazing! Keith. You're a genius! Hey, can you move this in the same way just like when it was little?”

I inquired while being very excited.

“Yep, it moves the same way,” he said.

“Please, show me how it moves!”

“Well, just a little, then.”

The three meter earth golem began moving with a thud. I was once again very, very impressed by the fact that the country I was living in now was one with magic. In fact, I had never seen any magic besides my own Earth Thud. But, Earth Thud was so shabby that it could barely be called magic at all.

So this is, magic..... Magic did not exist in my previous life. But, I had always longed for it. I had thought many times over, if only I could use magic. And now, magic is right in front of my eyes.

I want to touch it..... I really want to touch that earth golem that is moving by magic. Thinking so, I impulsively rushed up to the golem. Behind me, Keith seemed to say something while he was controlling the golem, but I was too excited to hear what he was saying.

I approached the golem, and stretched out my hand.....

At this time, the three meter earth golem's arm was making a large movement as well.

I think, the golem's arm probably hit me somewhere on my chest, and the impact was much, much stronger than I thought it would be.....

My body flew high up in the air, and I hit the hard ground head-first..... Ahh, there's been lots of these incidents recently..... I'm so unlucky..... As my consciousness was fading out, I heard Keith calling me over and over..... Ahh, I made such a kind-hearted stepbrother worry about me again..... Sorry, Keith.....

Then my consciousness was completely shut off.

★★★★★★

When I woke up, I was on top of my bed in my room. In front of me was a middle-aged man with tears and a runny nose instead of a great face – my father.

“Katarina~~!! You've finally woken up!!”

Father said so as he was hugging me. Upon receiving his bear hug, somehow or other my head and body seemed to be throbbing. Also, my father's tears and runny nose..... came very close to me. Please, just don't get it on my face... Father tried to fight off the tears by covering his face and wiping off his runny nose.

"Katarina, I know that you've just woken up, but how's your condition?"  
This time it was mother that spoke up.

".....Condition?"

"Did you forget? You were sent flying by Keith's earth golem, hit your head, and fainted!"

".....Oh, that's right!!!"

Since waking up to see my father with a runny nose was such a terrible sight, I forgot to think about why he was here. Even though mother had been spoiling Keith more than me lately, of course she was also worried about me.

"So, how's your condition? The doctor said that there's no problems besides a bump on your head, and some swelling on your back."

"Come to think of it, my head does hurt a little bit..... Oh wow, it's true, there really is a bump!"

When I touched my head the sudden pain informed me that there indeed was a bump on my head. My back was also aching a bit.

"Well, the doctor said that you will heal naturally in a few weeks. Until then you are to rest quietly. You are banned from entering the garden until you heal."

"Ehh, such a thing, but I have to take care of the field~~!"

Almost by reflex, I protested while glaring at my mother.

"If you're going to act so selfish, then in the future, you'll be banned from the garden permanently."

".....Such a thing..."

"Until you heal, you're not allowed in the garden. Behave. Got it!?"

".....Yes."

I shrank back like a frog that was being stared at by a snake.

"Hey, Anne." I spoke in a low voice to the maid Anne who was waiting next to me.

"Yes, Ojou-sama?"

"If I recall correctly, mother should be someone that feels more gentle....."

"Yes indeed, no matter who you ask, Madam always gives off a gentle feeling."

"Indeed, that's so. I wonder why she suddenly gave off such a strong impression..... I wonder if she's gained some confidence from being so lovey-dovey with father?"

"Ojou-sama, if her child is being a problem, the gentle mother will quickly disappear. Madam surely also has to change for the sake of her child."

"If her child is being a problem you say, what on earth are you saying. Keith is a very good child."

".....I'm really, really sorry for Madam."

And then, as I was secretly talking with Anne, I remembered.

"That's right! How is Keith?"

I involuntarily let out my voice. My father, the person who had been repeatedly saying "I'm glad Katarina is alright" while wiping his runny nose answered me.

"Keith returned to his room after the doctor told him that Katarina would be alright."

"Is that so. Since he was calling me so much when I was injured, he must have been quite worried."

“Katarina, about Keith.....”

Father didn't have his usual idiotic parent face, but put on a serious face.

“What is it?”

“Well, about Keith. Although he has really strong magic, he cannot handle it properly quite yet. As such, he will now be properly taught how to use it by the magic tutor, and has promised to not blindly use magic until he can control it. I also explained such a thing to you when you two first met, no?”

“.....Well, uh.....”

I don't remember hearing such a story..... That's right!? When father first introduced Keith to me, I was being too distracted by my own thoughts to listen to him.

“Father, I'm sorry. I, didn't hear what father was saying at all at that time.”

“Well, I thought it would be something like that.”

Father smiled wryly, while mother listening behind him had a shocked face.

“I never told this to you before though..... before, where Keith was living previously, his magic got out of control and injured his stepbrothers. Keith has a good understanding of his magic's scariness. So, I was very surprised to hear that Keith was using magic.”

I remembered how Keith was when I saw the magic. Although I was too excited to get a clear image of him, now that I think about it, he had a rather stiff face. He was very hesitant to use magic.

“Well, Keith said, ‘I arbitrarily broke the promise to not use magic, and even injured nee-san. Everything is my fault. Please, by all means, punish me.’”

“Such a thing!? Keith didn’t do anything wrong! It was me that was being unreasonable in demanding him to use magic! .....Besides.....”

What was it that Keith was saying to me while I was rushing towards the three meter earth golem..... I wasn’t really paying attention since I was too excited.....

Certainly, I think he said, “It’s dangerous! Nee-san, don’t get close!”

“Besides, even though Keith warned me to stay away from the golem because it was dangerous..... I, was too excited about the magic and didn’t hear him properly. Keith did absolutely nothing wrong. It’s all my fault as I got too carried away. I’m really sorry.”

As I was saying so, I lowered my head to mother, father, and Anne who were all worrying about me.

“As such, if there is any punishment, let me take it!”

I said so as I looked up at my father.

“Thank you for talking everything out properly. My cute Katarina. To both you and Keith, of course I have no intention to punish either of you. However, you definitely have to rest properly until your injuries are healed because you have been a little too tomboyish as of late. Understood?”

My father patted my head gently as he said so. I seem to have heard mother grumbling behind him “is being tomboyish really that cute?”

“I also have to go apologize to Keith.”

“You’re right, Katarina. But because it’s too late today, please do so tomorrow.”

If I look outside the window next to my father, it is indeed completely dark and the sun has set. Since Keith and I were out in the garden during early afternoon, I seem to have been asleep for almost half a day.

“Well then, come tomorrow I shall go apologize.”

“Please do so. Well then, from now, please earnestly rest.”

After stroking my head again, father pulled mother out of my room.

I asked Anne to help me get ready to rest again, and went back into my bed.

When I closed my eyes, I saw Keith’s stiff face in front of me.

Even without having heard my father’s story, I knew from the game settings that Keith had injured his stepbrothers by mistake before coming to this mansion. Before I lost my consciousness, Keith’s desperate voice calling me over and over had been like a scream of pain.....

His cuteness had turned into something really sad. Tomorrow, let’s go apologize to him first thing in the morning. I swore so to myself as I went to sleep.

However, I wasn’t able to fulfill this promise. Keith would no longer come out of his room.

## **08 – My stepbrother became a hikikomori shut-in**

The day after I got carried away and sent flying by the earth golem. I headed to Keith’s room first thing in the morning to apologize, maybe he still hasn’t gotten up or something, there’s no reply no matter how many times I knock. Well, even if he is still sleeping, and I’m unreasonably trying to wake him up, I thought that surely he would come to breakfast.

Keith didn’t come to breakfast.

Since Keith had shut himself in and missed a meal, mother and father were also very worried.

Mother even suspiciously asked me “Katarina, did you do something to him when you visited him in the morning?” How rude! Man, I didn’t do anything!

But anyways, because I was worried as well, I headed to Keith’s room again as soon as I finished eating. Just like this morning, no matter how much I knocked or talked through the door there was no reply.

“Keith. It’s me. Katarina. Since you didn’t come for breakfast, are you in bad shape?”

Then from within the room, a feeble voice answered.

“.....Nee-san.”

“Yes, it’s me. What’s wrong, Keith? Does your stomach hurt? Are you okay?”

“Nothing’s wrong with me. More importantly, are nee-san’s injuries okay?”

“Yep, I’m fine. It’s just a little bump on the head. Anyways, Keith, I have something to say. May I come in?”

I have to properly apologize to his face about the incident yesterday. However.....

“I’m sorry. You can’t.”

I was flat out rejected by his answer.

“Wh, What?”

“I can’t stay by nee-san anymore.”

Keith wouldn’t say anything else after that. Really, I have no idea what’s going on. What’s this, I think Keith hates me now.

Anyways, since I can’t do anything like this, I tried getting into his room, but the door knob wouldn’t turn when I placed my hand on it.



Apparently, it seems that it is locked. Even when asking Keith to open it, there is no reply. What should I do? At this rate, if Keith becomes a shut-in and starts hating me.....

Keith becomes a shut-in → Keith becomes lonely → He enters school like this → Has an encounter with the heroine which heals his loneliness → Keith falls in love with the heroine → Katarina gets in the way → the nuisance Katarina gets exiled or gets finished off by magic.

Oh no! This is so terrible! This is heading straight towards a destruction flag!!

And as I was desperately trying to break the door open with all my might, I heard Anne's voice.

"Ojou-sama, exactly what would you happen to be doing?"

"Well, Keith locked me out and I can't get in."

"Well, doesn't that mean that he doesn't want Ojou-sama to enter?"

Anne coolly sent me a look of compassion.

"Ugh, certainly, that might be so..... but, something seems strange about Keith."

I'm also in quite the desperate situation.

"For the time being, if you want to get in that badly, there's a spare key for each room in the servants' room..... Ojou-sama."

As soon as Anne told me, I dashed off to the servants' room.

However..... Once there, it became clear that Keith was holed up with the duplicate key as well. How smart Keith is!

However, this has confirmed it. Keith has become a full-blown hikikomori. This is getting dangerous, so so dangerous~.

At this point, I have no choice but to use my last resort. And so, I went to a certain place.

I got the item I was looking for, and headed back towards Keith's room.

"Ah, Ojou-sama. Did you find the spare key? Ojou-sama, what on earth!? What are you trying to do!?"

Anne who was still in front of Keith's room noticed me and spoke up, but suddenly let out a surprised voice when she saw what was in my hand. Meanwhile, I responded to Anne with a rough snort.

"I'm gonna open this door. If Keith stays shut-in like this, it'll turn into a big deal!"

"It couldn't be that you're going to open the door with that!? And if so, how are you going to open the door with that!? You're not planning to break the door down, are you..... Anyways, please calm down, and put that thing in your hands down."

Anne desperately tried coaxing me, but I paid her no mind at all. I mean, at this rate, the destruction end that I tried so hard to avoid at great length has turned into a straight path towards ruin.

"Keith. If you're close to the door right now, get away from the door."

I spoke towards inside Keith's room.

And then – I slammed the ax that I brought from the garden shed into the door.

"Ojou-sama~~~!!"

The crackling sounds of the door breaking mixed in with Anne's screams.

After breaking down the door, when entering the room I saw Keith on his bed with wide, round eyes. It looked like he had no idea what was going on. It seems as if Anne who was behind me went off to find someone to tattle on what the Ojou-sama did. Well, I'll leave the matter of the door for the time being, and apologize later. Keith comes first.

".....Nee-san."

I drew close to Keith who had wide round eyes and his mouth open agape. And then.....

"I'm so sorry about yesterday!!"

I kneeled down on the floor and bowed my head until it hit his bed. A so-called prostration. After all, it would not count as a sincere apology unless it was to this degree.

"Unreasonably asking you to use magic you could not control yet, I'm really sorry!! Moreover, not listening to your warning and trying to touch the earth golem..... Sorry for making you worry!!"

I desperately bowed my head as I said so. Before I realized it, Keith was crouching next to me.

".....Why is nee-san apologizing..... It was all my fault....."

"What are you saying? It was my fault! Because I asked such an unreasonable request of Keith!"

Looking at Keith next to me, he had his head down. Keith talked in a voice like he was barely squeezing it out.

".....Nee-san isn't scared of me?"

“Scared?”

What on earth would that mean? Well, if Keith continues shutting himself in like this, it will be extremely scary if he falls in love with the heroine and raises a destruction flag.....

Somehow or other, for some reason, he’s already started hating me and wants to dispose of me early.....? The destruction flag came early!?

“.....In my previous home, I injured my stepbrothers with magic. And this time, I’ve injured nee-san. Even though my magic is strong, I can’t control it properly.”

I held my breath at Keith’s words. ....So, he probably hates me now because I unreasonably asked him to use magic..... Is the destruction coming? Is it coming? How about it?

“.....Because I can’t control my powerful magic, it might keep hurting people. ....Nee-san isn’t scared of me?”

“.....Huh?”

Involuntarily, I let out a funny voice. Somehow, it doesn’t seem like a destruction flag.

“.....Oh, so it was something like this~~”

I was relieved, and let go of my breath, while Keith finally raised his face. There were such beautiful blue irises in his eyes.

“If you can’t control your magic, all you have to do is just work hard at mastering it now.”

In fact, in the game, Keith was able to properly manipulate his powerful magic. Keith is only eight years old now. From now on, if he trains properly, he will surely be able to control his magic before attending school.

“Since our magic tutor is coming soon, won’t you keep practicing magic together with me?”

Fully at ease now, I said to him with a foolish smiling face. Then, the silent Keith finally said something.

“.....Nee-san still wants to be with me?”

“Of course! I’ll always be with you, or else do you hate me?”

Keith shook his head vigorously. Apparently, I don’t seem to be hated anymore. I’m so glad.

“As such, even if something’s wrong, in the future don’t shut yourself in your room..... Uh, Keith, what’s wrong?”

As I was looking at Keith with relief..... Tears were dripping from his such beautiful blue eyes.

“Keith! What’s wrong? Does it hurt somewhere?”

Suddenly, I panicked as Keith started crying. We were just talking normally a minute ago! I, I’ve done something wrong!? Even though I desperately rubbed his small back, his tears wouldn’t stop. And so, Keith continued to cry, while I was lost not knowing what to do.

“.....Katarina, what on earth, are you doing?”

From the room’s entrance, I heard a low bass voice that was so low as if it was crawling on the earth. When I turned to look, I saw mother standing there with the face of a demon.

“Katarina, just the other day you had promised me to rest and behave until your injury healed..... What is this destruction to the door..... Moreover, your stepbrother is crying like this..... I wonder what on earth you are thinking.”

“Uh, uhh mother..... This is, well.....”

It was as if all the blood had been drawn from my body. I felt like I had been thrown into a cage with a lion.

“Katarina. For now, please come to my room.”

“.....Whimper.”

“Keith, you must have been scared. Since I’m going to take this with me, it’ll be alright.”

While pulling me by grabbing onto my collar, my mother turned to me with the reverse of the gentle eyes she had for Keith.

“.....Mo-, other, it’s not.....”

Keith raised his face like he was going to say something, but he couldn’t speak too well because of all the crying.

Without realizing it, a lot of servants had gathered in front of the room. However, at this time only the doting father was not to be seen. As such, I was forcibly taken away by my enemy to mother’s room.

After that, I had to listen to my demon mother’s lectures for several hours straight.

After being released from mother’s grasp, I returned exhaustedly to my room, where Anne met me with some tea. Her kindness touched my heart. I told her everything that happened, words flowing from me like a river. I drank the tea, and was finally able to rest a bit. Come to think of it, was Keith alright after crying so much? I asked Anne whether Keith was okay.

“After a while, he seems to have calmed down.”

“Is that so, I’m really glad. But, suddenly crying like that, I wonder what it was?”

“.....Ojou-sama, since Ojou-sama suddenly broke down the locked door, what will happen when you see someone invading your room with an ax in her hand?”

“.....Uh, well.....”

“If it had happened to me, I would be crying and screaming with fear.”

“..... I will go apologize to Keith later.”

“Yes indeed. Well, it might also be that he will cry and be scared again.”

“.....”

Anne’s logical analysis made me depressed. Certainly, when looking at it calmly, breaking down the door with an ax was a bit overboard. I was a bit too hasty after detecting a destruction flag. First of all, it would have been much better if I had done something like stick a wire in the keyhole.

But, since I can’t take back something I’ve done already, for the time being, since Keith might have been rather frightened, I will try and recover my relationship with him.

However, betraying my expectations, Keith came to see me with a smile on his face. On the contrary, saying something like “Nee-san didn’t do anything wrong. From now on you’ll always be with me, right” is the absolutely cutest thing he could have done. Moreover, he seems to have defended me in front of mother, and my punishment of no dinner was able to be rescinded. My stepbrother is not only very cute but also so kind. He really is the best brother ever.

And as such, curtains were closed successfully on the “Keith became a hikikomori shut-in” incident. From now on, to make sure Keith isn’t lonely, I’ll be sure to love him properly!

However, due to this incident, mother decided on her own to strictly train me all over again in the rules of etiquette.

In this way, I avoided the destruction flag, but faced another trial in the form of my demon mother and her etiquette lessons.

## 09 – Becoming Keith Claes

In the spring when I turned eight, my name became Keith Claes. This is the second time I'm changing my name. Even though I say so, I was too small to remember the first time.

However, until I turned three I was always told to stay by myself quietly in a small room, and the room had such a feeling of stillness. Then one day, a man I had never met before sent a fine horse-drawn carriage to bring me to a beautiful mansion.

And so, I met this person calling himself my father, as well as my stepmother and two stepbrothers. Everyone was looking at me with really cold eyes, and even though I was really young, I could tell that I wasn't welcome. Later, from hearing the servants' rumors, I learned that it was because my father had me with a prostitute mother.

In the new family that I had come to, calling them mom and dad was not allowed. It was like that with my brothers as well, I was always told to address them with honorifics. Since at first I wasn't used to using honorifics, I was often punished. I also wasn't allowed to eat with the family, and instead ate alone in my room.

My father and stepmother just treated me like I wasn't there, and no great harm was done, but..... My stepbrothers would always relentlessly harass me whenever they saw me. They're always punching or kicking me, and one time they locked me for an entire day alone in the barn.

Therefore, in order to avoid my stepbrothers as much as possible, I spent most of my time staying still, alone in my own room.

However, that happened.

The weather was very good on that day. There were some birds making a nest in the tree that was visible from the window of my room. With my whole heart, I wanted to see how the cute birds looked making their nest from a much closer distance.



Walking softly, I left my room and went towards the tree. I was found by my brothers that also happened to be outside. My brothers surrounded me and repeatedly hit and kicked me, while calling me "that whore's child." I curled up into a ball like always, and waited for them to get bored. It happened at that time. One of the brothers noticed the bird on the tree. "Oi. There's some birds there." "Oh, that's right. They're making a nest. Let's knock them off!" The brothers began throwing rocks at the birds as they said so. The nest that the birds had worked so hard to build was about to be destroyed. When the rocks were thrown at them, the birds started screeching in pain and fear.

".....Stop!!"

I shouted. And then, something hot poured out from my body. At that time. Something big fell from the sky. And, before I noticed, the brothers had fallen down prostrated before me. Around them, many chunks of dirt the size of fists were scattered about. It seemed that what fell from the sky was this clump of earth. Rather, there was also quite a few chunks of earth missing from the ground. Apparently, it seemed as if the brothers were injured somehow by all these clumps of earth. What on earth is all this. I stood stunned.

After that, the brothers were carried back to the house by servants that had seen the situation, and the doctor was called. The brothers had bruises all over their bodies, and the worst thing was that they had apparently broken a few bones as well.

And so, I learned that the pieces of earth that injured them were activated by magic that I had used.

From that day on, the place where I originally didn't belong, became even less welcoming. Except when necessary, I was forbidden to leave my room.

My brothers would no longer come close to me. If they saw me, they would just shout, "it's a monster!" and run away with fearful expressions. It wasn't only my brothers, my father, stepmother, and the servants all avoided me. And, although not that obvious, my brothers

always had fear in their eyes. I spent every day staying in my stifling room.

I spent time like that for several years. One day, I was told that yet another man I didn't know had come to see me.

"After hearing about your powerful magic, Duke Claes has decided to adopt you as his son."

And as such, I was once again taken to a new family in a horse-drawn carriage. Even though I had lived in this mansion for five years, nobody saw me off at all.

When comparing the mansion I arrived at with the one I had been living in, the difference in luxury was so large that it made the previous mansion look like a small house. Everything from the pots to the carpet, was decorated with a terrifyingly high-class feel.

The man who had become my new adoptive stepfather, was the head of this family, a man named Duke Claes.

"Hello, you're Keith, right? Welcome to our Claes family."

As Duke Claes greeted me with a wide smile, I was badly embarrassed as I was not used to being greeted like this. Duke Claes immediately introduced me to his family.

Duchess Claes seemed to be somewhat cold and distant.

And then, his only daughter, Katarina Claes. Since I had been tormented every day by my previous brothers, I was afraid of having siblings. If at all possible, I don't want to get involved with my new sister.

On the day that I arrived at Katarina's family, I had to rest in my room right after greeting everyone. Since I was brought suddenly from my previous place, I was quite exhausted, and even though the bed was unfamiliar and overly big, I slept deeply that night.

The next morning, I ate breakfast with Duke Claes and the family. It was my first time eating a meal with someone else. It was a more delicious meal than any other I had ever had.

Somehow, I returned to my room with a mysterious warm feeling in my chest. For some reason, Katarina has come to see me. If at all possible, I thought that I didn't want to get involved with her..... I never thought that she would come to see me.

She said "I'll guide you around the garden," so I replied "thank you very much, Katarina-sama" and she immediately started sulking after hearing my courteous reply.

"Keith, because we have become siblings now, it's fine to just call me nee-san." I was badly shocked. Since I was the younger brother as well in the previous family, of course I was not allowed to address my siblings without the proper honorifics.

She even begged "and for me, it's my dream to be called nee-san. Please, I beg you to call me that!" so I replied "I'll be in your care, nee-san." After that, Katarina laughed so so happily.

And then, we went to the garden together. Katarina guided me happily around the garden, and the weather was excellent.

After a while of talking to Katarina, I realized something. This girl named Katarina Claes is a little different from other noble daughters.

"I'm quite good at fishing. Let's fish together!" She invited me, and also explained about her field passionately. Because I had spent most of my time cooped up in my room, I had never done anything like fishing or making a field, but it didn't look like my brothers had such hobbies either. I think that most other noble children wouldn't have these kinds of hobbies.

That's what I was thinking while being surprised by Katarina.

“Keith, next I’ll take you to my favorite place.” As she said so, she grabbed my arm and began to walk quickly. And then, she took me to the tallest tree in the garden.

“You can get an amazing view of the scenery if you climb this tree.”

She said so while her eyes seemed to be sparkling. Then, she asked me if I had ever climbed a tree. I told her that I hadn’t.

“Well then, I’ll just teach you. First, start off by watching me climb, ok?”

As she said so, Katarina took her shoes off, then rolled up her dress and began climbing the tree.

I watched while stunned as Katarina climbed the tree smoothly. When looking up at Katarina from under her as she was climbing, I could see what was under her dress.

Either Katarina did not mind such a thing, or didn’t even notice, and kept climbing the tree smoothly. Then, around the middle of the big tree. Katarina stopped climbing and turned back to wave at me with a big smile. It was at that time. Her body shook. Watch out! I happened to be right under Katarina.

Katarina fell on me with a loud thud. At the time of impact, I lost my consciousness for a bit.

A little bit later, when my consciousness returned, I was in Katarina’s arms.

“Keith please don’t die~~” As she was crying, she didn’t notice me no matter how many times I tried to get her attention, until I greatly raised my voice and let her know I was okay.

“Keith!? You’re alive, right?!?” and hugged me strongly. I froze up involuntarily. It was the first time someone had hugged me like this.

“Oh no, Keith, does it hurt anywhere??”

Katarina anxiously stared at the frozen me. This is the first time that I have been worried about like this. I was badly embarrassed. Honestly, even though there's no place that's really sore, since she is so worried about me, I have no idea what I should do.

Upon seeing my embarrassed manner, Katarina seems to have misunderstood it as me being too injured to move.

"Keith, wait a little bit for me here, ok? I'll run right away to the mansion and get some servants to carry you back."

After saying so, Katarina started running towards the mansion while barefoot and with her dress still rolled up.

While watching her back grow smaller in the distance, a strange warm feeling rose in my chest just like what happened during breakfast.

That night, there was a big fuss when Duchess Claes suddenly demanded a divorce from Duke Claes, but the misunderstanding was resolved.

After that, since some misunderstanding about me was cleared up, Duchess Claes started treating me gently as well. Of course, Duke Claes also treated me very well.

Then, my stepsister Katarina taught various things to me. The first thing was fishing. She also taught me how to climb trees while saying "keep it a secret from mother, okay?" And when I was praised by the swordsmanship teacher, she was happy for me almost as if she was the one being praised instead.

Every day was exciting, fun, and happy..... which caused me to forget.

I'm a monster with uncontrollable magic.....

One day after finishing swordsmanship practice, I came with Katarina to the field. Katarina was very happy that her crops were growing up successfully.

When the story of the field changed to the story about magic, she said those fateful words.

“I want to be able to manipulate an earth golem!”

An earth golem – magic where a construct made of earth can move freely once you put magic into it. This is the magic that I used. It was a coincidence that I was able to use it. It became possible while I was making a clay doll by myself in my room. Since I barely had any contact with my previous family, I made a clay doll to accompany me during meals and be my friend.

It was magic I knew how to use, but I had made a promise with Duke Claes. I had some powerful magic, but was still unable to control it properly. I’ve also hurt my brothers at the previous family, and until I have been properly taught magic, I should not use magic blindly until I can control it.

However, when I saw Katarina staring at me full of expectations, I decided to use just a little bit of magic. The moving golem made Katarina so happy, that she begged me to make it even bigger.

And so, the earth golem became way too big and no longer moved as well as I wanted it to. Overjoyed, Katarina that was approaching the earth golem was..... sent flying by the arm of the earth golem I could no longer control.

Katarina’s tiny body flew in the air. Without even slowing down, Katarina slammed into the ground head-first.

After the servants got a doctor to check up on Katarina, it seems that she just fainted and got a bump on head, with no serious injuries.

That's what Duke Claes, who had been watching over Katarina worriedly, told me.

"I arbitrarily broke the promise to not use magic, and even injured nee-san. Everything is my fault. Please, by all means, punish me. I'm truly very sorry. I don't mind even if you drive me out of this family."

Duke Claes looked at me with such gentle eyes.

"About this incident, after Katarina wakes up, I also have to hear about it from her. Let's continue this after Katarina wakes up. Keith, your complexion looks terrible, as if you could fall over any moment. Since Katarina is alright now, you should also return to your room and rest."

As he said so, Duke Claes urged me to my room.

That night, I was sincerely relieved to hear that Katarina awoke with no problems. Even though I want to go see her immediately, I can't..... I was afraid.....

When the next day arrived, I couldn't move from my room. It's the first time I've missed breakfast since coming here.

Around the time that breakfast would end.

"Keith. It's me. Katarina. Since you didn't come for breakfast, are you in bad shape?"

Katarina came in front of my room.

".....Nee-san."

I replied on reflex.

"Yes, it's me. What's wrong, Keith? Does your stomach hurt? Are you okay?"

Even though she almost got seriously injured because of me, Katarina still seemed worried about me.

“Nothing’s wrong with me. More importantly, are nee-san’s injuries okay?”

“Yep, I’m fine. It’s just a little bump on the head. Anyways, Keith, I have something to say. May I come in?”

I was relieved to hear Katarina sounding so energetic. In truth, I want to see her face right now, but.....

“I’m sorry. You can’t.”

“Wh, What?”

“I can’t stay by nee-san anymore.”

I really really want to see her face now. The last time I saw her, she had lost her consciousness and her head was limp. I want to see her when she’s healthy.

But, I cannot stay by Katarina anymore.

If a monster like me that might lose control of his magic at any time stays by Katarina, I might hurt her again. I don’t want to hurt this friendly Katarina that taught me so many things anymore.

Katarina was talking a lot outside my room, but I just stayed in my bed, curled up into a ball.

I had been living alone in my room originally anyways. And if I’m by myself... I won’t hurt anyone important to me anymore.

After a while, I couldn’t hear Katarina’s voice anymore.

She probably gave up on my coldness after I stopped replying to her and returned to her room.

As I was thinking that absentmindedly...



“Keith. If you’re close to the door right now, get away from the door.”

I heard Katarina’s voice again after I thought she had already given up.

By itself, the door that had been locked was making a crackling sound, then broke. At the entrance, for some reason I saw Katarina standing there with a desperate face while holding an ax. I just looked at her while stunned, and she came inside the room. And then.....

“I’m so sorry about yesterday!!”

Katarina kneeled in front of my bed and bowed her head until it hit the bed.

“Unreasonably asking you to use magic you could not control yet, I’m really sorry!! Moreover, not listening to your warning and trying to touch the earth golem..... Sorry for making you worry!!”

I got out of bed, and crouched next to Katarina.

“.....Why is nee-san apologizing..... It was all my fault.....”

“What are you saying? It was my fault! Because I asked such an unreasonable request of Keith!”

Why, is this person still coming to me? Why is she saying things like this? She should be scared of my magic, and she even got injured..... And yet.....

“.....Nee-san isn’t scared of me?”

“Scared?”

“.....In my previous home, I injured my stepbrothers with magic. And this time, I’ve injured nee-san. Even though my magic is strong, I can’t control it properly. ....Because I can’t control my powerful magic, it might keep hurting people. ....Nee-san isn’t scared of me?”

I even told her about my past incident. This way, Katarina shouldn’t be getting close to me anymore.

I was scared. That I might hurt Katarina..... And, even more than that, that Katarina would have eyes full of fear towards me like my previous family..... To be hated as a monster..... That was my greatest fear.

Then, I looked properly into Katarina's eyes for the first time since she had come into the room. If, there was fear in her eyes.....

I was waiting for Katarina's next words with bated breath.

".....Oh, so it was something like this~~"

The words were so unexpected, that I involuntarily raised my face. I met Katarina's light blue eyes.

"If you can't control your magic, all you have to do is just work hard at mastering it now. Since our magic tutor is coming soon, won't you keep practicing magic together with me?"

Katarina said so with no fear in her eyes and a smile on her face..... her eyes were so gentle.

".....Nee-san still wants to be with me?"

"Of course! I'll always be with you."

Being alone was so sad and painful..... I always wanted someone to be with me. But, nobody would be close with me. Anyone that got close to me would only call me names like "that whore's child" and "monster." I thought nobody would ever be with me..... I had already given up.....

The girl in front of me had said with a smile, that she'll be with me forever.

"As such, even if something's wrong, in the future don't shut yourself in your room..... Uh, Keith, what's wrong?"

Katarina had a surprised voice as she anxiously peered at my face. When I touched my face..... it was wet for some reason. Tears were overflowing from my eyes. Ahh, I'm crying.

Before I had always cried silently in my room. Tears had always flowed when it was lonely or painful. Crying to the point where my chest hurt, it was painful. And yet.....

Something about these tears. As I cried, the more I cried the warmer my chest got. I learned for the first time that tears also come out when I'm happy.

Katarina was peeping at me anxiously, while stroking my back. It was a very warm and gentle hand.

While feeling her warm hand I thought strongly. I want to be with this girl named Katarina Claes. I want to be with her as long as it is permitted.

I will train my magic, and learn how to properly control it. And, I want to stand by her side one day and be able to protect her

## **10 – I was invited to a tea party**

As the seasons changed, it finally became summer. I, Katarina Claes, became nine years old.

For birthday presents, father gave me a lovely dress, and Keith got me a flower bouquet. As for my mother, she gave me a mountain of books on manners.

Prince Jared brought me a somewhat expensive looking necklace for some reason, but..... Because I can't accept such an expensive thing, I refused with all my might. Still, the prince insisted on giving me something, so I asked for watermelon seeds. I wanted some fruits in my field.

When I asked for seeds, the prince froze solid for quite a while, but he did send me some splendid seeds the next day. I immediately planted

them in the field. When the watermelon is ripe, let's share some with the prince.

By the way, my doting father seemed to have wanted to celebrate a big birthday party for me, but..... I really hated the idea of it, and mother also said "please stop as it would only further expose our embarrassment."

However, it seems that the social debut party upon reaching fifteen years old was unavoidable for a family of the Duke's stature.

"I'll figure something out before then," said mother enthusiastically, and my Spartan mother powered up the horrifying etiquette lessons even further.

My long-sought after magic tutor has finally arrived, and magic training began. My magic tutor taught me that "interacting with oneself's own source of magic power does not mean interacting with the earth," apparently making a field wouldn't strengthen my magic after all. However, since it's now become a hobby, I'll continue with it.

A few months after beginning magic training, Keith was able to considerably improve his control over magic. He is quite the stepbrother indeed. As for me..... well, I was able to improve Earth Thud from two, three centimeters all the way to seven, eight centimeters. To me, this is quite something. At this rate, I should be able to control an earth golem as freely as Keith pretty soon.

And in this way, even though I can't say that everything was smooth sailing, I had a daily life that was fulfilling in its own way, but.....

".....Hmm. I wonder what it is."

I let out a huge sigh and squatted in the field.

Standing by my side, was my perfectly cute stepbrother that I had taken to, and Prince Jared who had been coming over for the last three days to see his fiancée.

“What’s wrong? Nee-san.”

“What’s the matter? Katarina.”

Keith and Prince Jared asked me.

I showed them a corner of the field.

“Look at this.”

The vegetables I pointed at were completely wilted. Even though it’s almost time for the harvest..... this doesn’t seem like it will bear fruit.

“This, is something I have planted and taken care of.”

I was downhearted. Why..... Only the place where I planted and took care of.....

In the previous life I wasn’t very good at taking care of plants. From a morning glory flowerpot, to the loofah plant that everyone had in school, everything I took care of wilted.

But, I have been reincarnated. This time, I’ll definitely be able to raise them well! ..... Is what I thought. I stared sadly at the wilted vegetables.

“Nee-san, aren’t you just tired from working too hard? We should take a break here.”

“That’s right. Katarina, you should get some rest here.”

The drooping me was comforted by both Keith and Prince Jared, and both of them held out their hands to me. They stared at each other while holding their hands out.

“Prince Jared, I’ll be taking nee-san. It’s fine even if you don’t come to visit her all the time!”

“Since Katarina is my fiancée, I’ll be taking her. Keith, you don’t always have to stick so close to Katarina all the time!”

Two people that had almost no contact in the game, were now getting along great. They were both laughing at each other, and both seemed to be having fun while talking.

And so, after giving them a sidelong glance, I went back to staring at the wilted vegetables and gave another loud sigh.

★★★★★★★★★★

“Katarina, you’ve been invited to a tea party, would you like to give it a try and go?”

“A tea party?”

I listened to father while talking with a mouth full of bread. And, since mother glared at me, I swallowed the bread in a hurry.

“That’s right, a tea party. Since you’re nine years old already, how about trying to attend one?”

Tea parties here, seem to be common here for noble children around nine or ten years old to have in order prepare them for their social debut at age fifteen. It serves the purpose of allowing noble children of similar age to interact with each other.

“Uh.....”

“Impossible! Katarina has no manners whatsoever!”

My reply was forcibly interrupted by my mother.

“Well, even if that’s so..... it might be beneficial for her to learn by getting some real practice once in a while. And this time, it’s our relatives inviting us, instead of some other family, so I think it’ll be perfect for her first time.”

Father glanced at me briefly. Huh? What did father just say? Why is he looking away?

“.....Indeed, maybe if she got some real experience, she could learn some etiquette.....”

Mother looked at me with empty eyes. Why does she have those eyes?

“Oh yes, how about letting Keith tag along. If Keith goes, I’ll be relieved.”

“Yes, indeed. I’ll be more at ease if Keith goes too.”

Mother agreed with what she considered to be father’s good idea.

In the few months since Keith’s come here, his evaluation has been quite excellent, unlike his older sister.

“Keith, would you go along with Katarina to her tea party?”

“Yes, I’ll be more than happy to accompany nee-san.”

Upon being asked by father, Keith replied with a smile.

Huh? Even though I’m the older sister? Why am I being accompanied by Keith like a burdensome useless child?

Even though there were many points that were hard for me to swallow, thus I went together with Keith to attend my first tea party.



After very strict etiquette training from mother, accompanied by lots of nagging, the day of the tea party has finally arrived.

Father had a new dress specially made for me to wear to this tea party, and like so Keith and I arrived at the party organizer, Marquis Hunt's family.

"Katarina-sama, Keith-sama, thank you very much for participating in our family's tea party today."

The person greeting us was the eldest daughter of the Hunt family, Lilia Hunt. She is a fourteen year old girl with honey-colored hair and eyes, the year right before she's expected to make her social debut.

There were three girls standing behind Lady Lilia. They were probably all Lilia's younger sisters. The Hunt family had four girls, including Lilia.

Lilia's sisters began greeting us in order. The second and third daughters greeted us while smiling. Both of them had hair and eyes that looked very similar to their honey-colored older sister. I returned their greetings as gracefully as I could remember how to, with my mother's lessons.

And then, after those two finished their greetings..... From behind them, one more girl walked out nervously.

"..... Pl, pleased to meet you. I'm the youngest daughter... M, Mary Hunt."

She gave her name with a voice that could be barely heard, and her auburn hair and eyes was nothing like her sisters.

However, her large eyes and nice pink lips made her a very cute beauty. Meanwhile, I elegantly greeted her just as how I remembered with the



others. And then, as soon as the greeting was over, Mary immediately retreated behind the others.

I wonder if she's scared of my villainous face? Even though this face says "The Villain" but I certainly won't bully you.

While becoming a little sad, I watched the Hunt sisters greet the next guest.

By the way, about this time's tea party –

I promised mother that I would try to speak as little as possible, and just smile. I'm not allowed to stuff myself full of sweets. I must drink tea little by little. I must not roll up my skirt even by mistake. Mother told me all this while sticking to my ear so closely like an octopus.

Therefore, as I was allowed to, I just smiled gracefully, and sipped my tea.

This tea party's buffet format consciously mimics high society's dance parties.

The Hunt sisters were continuously greeting various other noble sons and daughters, they just kept coming, without giving them any time to have tea.

They repeated the greetings, walking all around the room several times before noticing, that they had finally finished and were dead tired when they were ultimately able to have their tea.

As for me, I was trying my best, to control my hand and only take a few cookies. Oh my? This cookie is delicious. Yeah, I'll have one more. I'll have another. Oh, there's a muffin in a place like this. I'll try one.

At any rate, there sure are a lot of sweets left. Since most of the guests were chatting with each other, these prepared sweets have barely decreased at all. Such a waste. ....If there's any Tupperware I want to

take some home. I wonder if I can borrow any Tupperware from the Hunt family.

“Nee-san.”

“.....Ke, Keith!?”

Suddenly, I jumped up involuntarily when my stepbrother appeared from behind. While I was watching the greetings Keith had imperceptibly been standing behind me.

“You surprised me. Keith, you finished going around greeting everyone without incident?”

“Yep, just about finished with everyone. That aside, why are you spacing out here?”

“.....Uh.....”

“You couldn’t have been thinking about taking the extra sweets back home, could you?”

“!?”

Keith is amazing!? What is this child, an esper? So awesome. Why is it that you know what I’m thinking.

“Amazing. You know me so well!”

“.....I know you so well..... isn’t what you should be saying, nee-san. If you do such a thing, the Claes’ family dignity will become suspect. And if mother finds out, you’ll be banned from eating sweets for a while, nee-san.”

“..... Ugh. For sure.”

The other day, when I ate a cookie that fell by my bed during etiquette training using the three second rule, I was banned from eating sweets for three full days as punishment for eating it. If I get discovered trying to bring sweets home in Tupperware, I’ll probably be banned from

eating sweets for three days to a week. That would be quite troubling..... Even though it's regrettable..... I guess there's no helping it.

And since I can't take any of it back with me..... more and more of the sweets lined up ended up in my mouth suddenly. The promise with mother was forgotten to oblivion.

Keith said several times "that's enough already, nee-san" and tried to stop me but I told him "just a little more" and kept devouring the sweets.

I mean, it would be such a waste since there's still this much remaining. Besides, everything is so delicious.

Oh, this is also delicious. That one too, and this one over there..... As a result, I got carried away eating too many sweets and got a painful stomach ache.

I told Keith who was worried about my strange appearance that I was alright, and walked myself slowly in search of a restroom.

I asked a servant where the restroom was, and he offered to guide me, but I rejected that and ran towards the restroom on my own. If I'm guided there while trying to act graceful, I won't make it in time. And somehow, I barely made it in time.....

I had been running so desperately that I didn't even know how to get back to the room with the tea party anymore. While the Hunt mansion was not as large as the Claes mansion, since they were a Marquis's family, the mansion was still quite splendid. Briefly speaking, it didn't seem likely that I could return to the tea party on my own. If only I could meet a servant, and ask the way back.....

Like this, as I was walking around absentmindedly... A beautiful vision entered my sight. There were flowers spread out in some place sort of like a courtyard.

They were so beautiful that I ran up to them on reflex. Then, I saw a girl standing in the flowers all by her lonesome.

Having heard me, the confused girl noticed my presence and addressed me.

".....K, Katarina-sama. Why are you in a place like this?"

Oh yeah, thinking back, this girl seems to be the youngest daughter of the Hunt family that I greeted earlier, Mary.

".....Uh, just a little change of pace."

There's no way that I could tell her that I gave myself a stomach ache by eating too many sweets, and even got lost and couldn't find the way back anymore. Since there way no way I could say it, I told a suitable white lie.

"As for Mary-sama, what are you doing here?"

Setting the matter of the lost me with a stomach ache aside, shouldn't it be bad for the daughter of the party organizer to be here?

".....I'm, not, too good with really lively places....."

Mary said so with a quiet voice like when she greeted me and her head down. Even though she's such a beautiful girl, it's such a waste when she has her head down like that.

.....Anyways, it must be that she's scared of the villainous face.....  
However, if I use this villainous face to tell her "I definitely won't bully you," it's quite likely that I'll scare this pitiful beauty even more. For the time being, I've got to let her know that I mean her no harm!

"Th, this garden is quite something. All these flowers are really beautiful."

For the time being, I'll talk to her while trying my best to smile without giving off any villainous vibes.

However, what instantly came out of my mouth was my true feelings.

This garden was really beautiful, even more amazing than the one that the Claes family had. The flowers were all gorgeous in their full bloom. The gardener-san here must be really good at raising plants.

.....That's right!! I got a great idea. The person that brought up these amazing flowers, would surely also be able to revive my wilting field.

As soon as I thought of it, I asked Mary.

"Hey, Mary-sama, would it be possible for you to introduce the gardener-san responsible for this garden to me?"

".....Eh....."

"To the gardener-san that can grow such gorgeous flowers, I would love to be able to consult them on something."

To the bewildered Mary, I begged her by all means possible, while breathing hard. Then, I heard her soft voice yet again.

".....It, it's me."

"Eh?"

"I'm the one that's taking care of this garden."

What's this!? Mary's taking care of everything by herself!?

"Mary-sama's taking care of it!? This entire garden!?"

"No, not everything by myself, just the flowers and plants that you see here are what I'm taking care of."

So, this location's wonderful blooming flowers are all Mary's handiwork.....

“.....Amazing.”

“.....Eh.....”

“It’s so amazing that you can create such a fine garden! How on earth did you get all the flowers to bloom beautifully like this! There must be some secret technique! Or some secret to the soil!”

“.....Uh, uh, Katarina-sama.”

I was so excited that I had edged up to Mary instinctively. Then I noticed that the pitiful beauty had been completely scared by my excitability and rough breathing. Oh no..... I was too excited. I took a deep breath, and tried to smile as elegantly as possible.

“Well, by all means, I would like to request a consultation with Mary-sama that created such a garden.”

“...A consultation?”

“Yes.”

I told Mary about my field that was wilting before the summer harvest. At first, she asked me if I made the field myself, and was very, very surprised to hear that I had, but she listened to me seriously about the condition of my field. I was relieved to see that her expression was no longer as frightened as it was before. Then, she finished listening to the story.

“.....Since you’re putting so much trust in my abilities, I would love to be of some help, but..... I’ve never grown vegetables before, so, I can’t say anything by just listening to your story. I’m really sorry to not have been of any help.”

“Well then, how about coming over to my place?”

To Mary who was bowing her head in sadness, I simply said this at a critical moment.

“That, but.....”

To the puzzled Mary, I argued vehemently that she would most definitely be welcome to come over.

This is a matter of life or death for my important field. I don't want it to have a life like that of my previous morning glory and loofah plants all over again.

And then, as I desperately persuaded with Mary to the breaking point, I was finally able to obtain a promise of coming out to see the field herself. However, when I said "it's really good to have met you," I was rejected.....

Well, I became happy at getting her promise, and was guided back to the tea party after that by Mary without any problems.

Then, Keith who had been worrying about me that disappeared for a long time scolded me, asking me exactly where I had been. Somehow, it feels like the positions of older sister and younger brother have been completely reversed.

Thus, I completed my first tea party safely without messing up big time somehow.

## **11 - I discovered the truth**

A few days after safely completing the tea party, Mary came over to my place as promised. Amazingly enough, Mary seems to have studied about vegetables for the sake of my field. What a kind child!

Talking with her, I discovered that we were the same age, and that Mary was also a person with magic power, making her easy to understand and get along with. She seemed quite frightened in the beginning, but smiles can finally be seen.

And then, my field was completely resurrected by Mary who came to visit many times over.

“Mary. Really, thank you. Thanks to you, the field has become completely healthy.”

I thanked Mary while looking at the recovered field.

“No, it’s because Katarina-sama has worked very hard.”

Mary said so while smiling. It’s such an adorable beauty’s smile, a heavenly sight to behold.

“Man, I thought they might even wither and die..... As I thought, Mary is really amazing.”

“.....No, nothing of the sort.”

Although Mary is being humble, she’s really very good at growing plants, and after coming in contact with Mary’s hands, even plants on the verge of death have been revitalized. Mary’s hands are special. That’s right, about these type of hands, they were called...

“Mary, you have a green thumb!”

“.....Green thumb?”

“Yep, a green thumb. It means your hands have a special talent for growing plants!”

“.....Special talent.....”

“Yeah, Mary’s just overflowing with talent when it comes to growing plants!”

I was squeezing both of her hands as I was saying so. Mary was staring wide-eyed at her clenched hands.

“.....My hands are special.....”

“Yep, you and your green thumb are an amazing, special existence!”



I said so while smiling, and Mary cracked a faint smile as well. Her smile was as lovely as if flowers were blooming.

“Katarina-sama, the field has returned to a healthy state, but..... if it’s okay with you, is it alright if I come visit again?”

“Of course, you’re more than welcome to come over and play anytime.”

I told the somewhat reserved Mary that she was “very, very welcome,” and laughed happily.

“Having a green thumb is so amazing.”

As I sent off Mary, Keith who had been left alone standing by my side quietly up until now spoke up.

“Indeed, someone like Mary who is so good at growing plants is quite a person.”

“Yes, that’s right. I read a book a long time ago titled “The Girl with the Green Thumb,” has nee-san also read this book?”

“Uh... I don’t think I’ve read that book..... I don’t quite remember how I knew about it.”

For some reason, it just came to mind all of a sudden while watching Mary. I wonder where I knew about it from?

“Well anyways, Mary has become really bright now.”

“That’s right. At first, she was really scared of me.”

“Eh, she was scared of nee-san?”

“.....Yeah, it must be the fault of my villainous face.”

I mocked myself slightly to the shocked Keith. I hate this villainous face that I’ve inherited from mother’s genes.

“.....Saying it’s a villainous face..... I don’t think any such thing..... Also, I don’t think Mary-sama was only scared of nee-san. It felt that way no matter who she was speaking to.”

“.....Eh, was that so?”

“Yeah, she gave off a super nervous feeling with everyone she met..... There must be various circumstances at home that caused her to completely lose her self-confidence.”

“.....Various circumstances? Like what?”

I thought it was quite a mystery while Keith looked at me as if I was insane.

“What exactly did nee-san even do at the Hunt family’s tea party? You should have heard about all this at the tea party.”

“.....Uh...”

After I finished my greetings, I was busy thinking about how to take the sweets home with me. After I was caught by Keith, I was busy eating the sweets that I wouldn’t be able to take home. As such, I barely even participated in the tea party. Well, at least I didn’t get into any trouble. Rather, it was kind of a strategy of sorts. Yeah, let’s go with that.

Keith who was staring at me seemed to have given up on something and gave a loud sigh. Er, I feel kinda sorry now, my stepbrother.

And then, Keith told me the story he had heard at the tea party.

It seems that, as for the four Hunt sisters, the first three have the same mother, while the youngest child Mary’s mother is the second wife. After his first wife died of all illness, Mary’s mother entered the family as the second wife. However, it seems that Mary’s mother does not have a very high status, so Marquis Hunt’s remarriage was not very welcome. Moreover, even Mary’s mother was married over her objection, and also died of illness when Mary was five. Although the remaining Mary was

cherished by her father, it seems that sparks often flew between Mary and her sisters.

As such, it seems that Mary hears mean things like “your blood is low status” or “you have no class” from her sisters every day.

“.....So, that’s why, Mary seemed to be so nervous at first.”

Certainly, if you heard your relatives saying bad things about you every day, your self-confidence would disappear. If you think yourself to be useless, then appearing in front of people could very well be frightening.

“But, it seems like she’s changed quite a lot, Mary-sama will surely be alright now.”

Keith said so with a face as if he knew everything for some reason. He looked so self-assured that I wondered if he knew something else he wasn’t telling me. Even though I asked, he seems to be taking me lightly.

My stepbrother that was at first just bouncing around behind me when he first came here, had somehow completely matured in just a few months.

He is desperately working hard in both etiquette and magic lessons, and when I said to my maturing brother that “you don’t have to hurry up and become an adult this fast,” he replied “I want to get as much power as fast as possible in order to protect what’s important to me,” with a very grown-up look. Honestly, I’ve even become a bit lonely. Moreover, he wouldn’t even tell me what it was that he wanted to protect, oneechan is feeling completely left out here.

“Come to think of it, it’s about time for Mary-sama’s engagement to Prince Alan to be determined.”

“...Oh, really?”

I responded with whatever seemed appropriate while watching Keith. While I was thinking I could have a cute little brother for a bit longer, he’s already becoming an adult..... Moreover, what could he possibly

want to protect. It couldn't be, does he already have someone he likes!? Hey now, first of all, please introduce her properly to onee-chan! I won't forgive her if she seems too weird.....

.....Huh? What did Keith say just now?

".....Keith. What did you just say?"

".....Nee-san."

Keith made a stunned face again. I'm so sorry.

"I was saying, it's about time for Mary-sama's engagement to Prince Alan to be determined."

".....Eh? Mary is getting engaged to who.....?"

"It's Prince Alan. Prince Jared's younger twin brother, the fourth prince of this country."

"!?"

"Mary-sama is currently the best candidate to become Prince Alan's fiancée."

".....Prince Alan's fiancée?"

"It hasn't been decided officially yet, but it should be soon. Marquis Hunt's family is quite high status and wealthy, and she is the same age as Prince Alan and a good match for him..... Hey, nee-san, where are you going?!"

In the middle of Keith's explanation, I had already run inside to my room.

Prince Alan, or Alan Stuart, was one of the heroine's capture targets. I had to review my "Previous life's game memories" notes as quickly as possible.

I immediately opened up to the section on Prince Alan as soon as I returned to my room.

Alan Stuart. Jared's younger twin brother, the fourth prince of the country. Until he was five, he was quite sickly, and almost died. Because of that, he was raised over protectively, and became a rather spoiled prince. However, compared to his older twin that can do anything, he's a bit perverted. He always had a strong sense of rivalry and inferiority towards his older twin, and barely interacted with him at all.

Such an Alan attended school with his twin, viewing his brother as a rival to defeat, and strove to train in magic. During this time, for the results of the first academic tests, Alan was ranked third. In first place was his brother Jared, and second place was the heroine. Not only did he not beat his brother, but since he also lost to a commoner girl, he got involved with her by viewing her as a rival to beat.

Then, while getting himself involved with the bright, optimistic heroine, he fell in love. And, the heroine told him that "it's fine for Alan to just be Alan," his strong sense of inferiority gradually faded, and he even began interacting with his brother Jared normally.

By the way, the villainess Katarina Claes does not appear on Alan's route. She slightly teased the commoner heroine for her good grades, but it was nothing obnoxious like the Jared or Keith routes. There was a different rival that appeared instead. That would be, Prince Alan's fiancée, Marquis Hunt's daughter, Mary Hunt.

Mary, who loved Prince Alan from the bottom of her heart, was jealous of the heroine, but..... she didn't stoop to the level of Katarina's harassment.

Mary was an obstacle to the heroine in the form of a wonderful lady. Showing the difference between her and a commoner in areas such as etiquette and dance, she was a dignified rival to the heroine.

In contrast to Prince Jared's utter lack of feelings towards Katarina, although Prince Alan didn't hold romantic feelings towards Mary, he treated Mary very well and thought of her as a cute sister.

The game's ending was also completely different from the Katarina endings.

If the heroine captures Alan successfully, and gets the happy end –

Mary will give up Alan over to the heroine, and congratulate them while asking the heroine to “always support Prince Alan from now on.”

However, it was a saddening scene where there were tears in her eyes as she said so.

And, if the heroine fails to capture Alan, and gets the bad end –

Alan gets married with Mary as originally promised, and all is well that ends well.

I thought as hard as I could with this information in front of me.

Why is it only to Katarina!! Even though she is also a rival character, Mary doesn't have any destruction flags! To begin with, Mary is such a wonderful character! Why is it only Katarina that's such a terrible villain!

What could the production staff possibly be thinking! Why, is it only Katarina that's this pathetic! The setting is too pitiful! You guys should have went over Katarina Claes again, and given her a chance to redeem herself!

And somehow Alan, is lucky enough to become happy in both the happy and bad ends! Even though Jared and Keith have to disappear as criminals for killing Katarina in their bad ends! It's preposterous! I can't

forgive the production staff! If I can return to my previous life again, I'm definitely going to go to this otome game company and make a complaint!!

.....And, after releasing my hot-blooded passion, I looked at the notes again.

There's no mistake about it, "Mary Hunt" definitely seems to be my kind, cute friend. Because the game's Mary was such a perfect lady, it was hard to connect her to the Mary that is so timid now.

To begin with, there was no friendship between Katarina and Mary in the game, I think. Rather, Mary didn't seem to think highly of Katarina's style of getting her own way in everything by abusing her father's authority.

No way, even though Mary is also a rival character like me.

However, Mary doesn't even know how to write Alan's name currently. It seems that the engagement hasn't been decided yet, and they probably haven't even met.

If I recall correctly, the heroine heard about their first meeting during the confrontation with Mary in Alan's route.

In her childhood, Mary often clashed with her sisters from a different mother, and grew up hearing mean comments from her sisters every day, losing her self-confidence completely and thinking herself a useless person. In front of such a Mary, appeared Prince Alan, who praised Mary for her garden that she raised.

"Mary's amazing. You have a green thumb!"

It is said that having a green thumb means your hands have a special talent for growing plants. And then, the prince told Mary that she was an amazing, special existence for having a green thumb.

Mary regained some of her lost self-confidence from hearing Prince Alan's words. And then, before she realized, she had come to love Prince Alan more than anyone else.

After that, Mary worked hard every day to become a worthy enough person to stand next to Prince Alan, and became a splendid lady admired by everyone by the time she entered school.

Such a big difference from Katarina, who neglected her magic studies, only chasing after Prince Jared instead. Mary is really great.

You and your green thumb are an amazing, special existence, eh... Prince Alan also said such wonderful words.

.....Green thumb..... Oh, that's it! This is why I know about what a green thumb is. Ohh, it's refreshing to have finally remembered.

So that was it, it's something that Prince Alan said to Mary..... that you and your green thumb are an amazing, special existence.....

Huh? I, I just said this a little while ago to Mary.....

.....Oh no!? I, ended up stealing Prince Alan's words!? I couldn't have used the Prince's famous pick-up lines before he did!! What should I do, at this rate Prince Alan will tell her rehashed lines instead. Even though they're great lines, it'll only have half the power the second time around.

Ahh, I'm such an idiot, if only I had noticed quicker..... I reflected in remorse alone in my room for a while.....

Well, I can't take back what I've already said. I felt defiant about it. And, because Prince Alan is a wonderful prince in an otome game, he'll be fine even if I steal one of his lines. I'm sure, he'll think of something even



more fabulous in order to make Mary enamored with him! It's nothing much if I just take one line! Not a big deal!

After coming to a conclusion, and sorting out my feelings, I went back to find Keith, who I had left behind.

★★★★★★★★★★

My name is Mary Hunt. I'm the youngest of four daughters in Marquis Hunt's family.

Although my mother was a very beautiful person, she wasn't highly thought of in the mansion because her social status was low.

Even so, father and mother were very much in love. However, my three older sisters didn't seem to think very highly of me.....

However, when mother passed away – the environment around me changed completely. Since father was often out working, without mother anymore I had no more place in this mansion.

Originally, since the servants were not very accepting of mother as she was low in social status, they would also not treat her daughter very well either.

And, my three older sisters began to harass me once my mother's protection was lost.

They would hide my things, or break them, or call me all sorts of names.

"Dirty redhead," "filled with low status," "low class." Hearing this abuse and harassment every day, my heart became quite weak, and I became afraid to come into contact with people, and was always frightened. And, I was thinking that I'm just such a helpless child.

My only escape was the courtyard garden. The only peace I got was when I was taking care of the plants there.

Then, one day, I met her at a tea party that was hosted by the Hunt family. While I was only frightened, the other girl identified herself as Katarina Claes.

Katarina returned a magnificent greeting to me in our first meeting, it was like we were from completely different worlds.

Since I'm a wimp that's afraid of people, I ran from the tea party while it was still going on. And, just like usual, I escaped to the courtyard garden.

There, the issue of Katarina Claes appeared.

Katarina, who ran up to the garden suddenly, praised the plants that I had been taking care of. Since nobody had praised me like this since mother died, I had completely forgotten what it was like.

Then, Katarina asked me to look at the field she made herself, because it was in bad shape. Honestly, I'm shocked that a duke's daughter would make a field by herself, but the way Katarina talked about her field passionately with a twinkle in her eyes was actually pretty cute.

Then, I agreed to go visit the Claes family, and help with the matter of the field. I studied desperately about vegetables because I wanted to help Katarina even just a little.

Katarina was always so grand, bright, and optimistic, she was really amazing. And, each time I got praised by Katarina I regained some of my lost self-confidence.

"Mary, you have a green thumb! It means your hands have a special talent for growing plants! Yep, you and your green thumb are an amazing, special existence!"

I had thought that I was only a good-for-nothing cowardly wimp. However, Katarina was telling me that I was a special existence. And that I was amazing. I was really, really happy.

I want to become someone worthy of standing next to Katarina as a friend.

That's why, I shall say goodbye to the cowardly wimp Mary Hunt. Definitely so, in order to one day stand proudly next to Katarina.

## **12 – I was challenged to a match**

A few weeks have passed since my field was resurrected, and it's now the middle of summer. Finally I heard the news that Mary and Prince Alan have been officially engaged.

And today, when Mary visited the Claes mansion, I immediately tried to shake her for information.

"Mary, so the engagement was decided on, congratulations!"

"Yes. Thank you very much. I'm now a prince's fiancée as well. I'll be together with Katarina-sama, I'm so happy!"

Mary is very happy, but..... it doesn't sound very much like it's because she is longing for Alan.

"Uhh, have you already met Prince Alan?"

"Yes. I already met him."

".....And, how was it?"

"How was what?"

"Well..... like what did you think of him....."

After all, since I stole his famous pick-up line earlier, I still feel a little bit guilty towards Prince Alan. I wonder if Prince Alan was able to attract Mary without his best line.

“He was quite a handsome person. Oh, and he praised me in the same way that Katarina did about my garden.”

“Ohh. And then?”

Hmm. For now, it was just like the scenario. What I was concerned about was what comes after.

“What do you mean, and then?”

“Uhh, is there anything after that?”

“.....That’s all there is.”

Mary looked at me curiously. What’s this!? That’s all!? Oh no, what about those lines in question..... Did he not say them?

“Well, uh. I wonder, did he say anything about Mary’s green thumb?”

“.....Green thumb..... Man, Katarina-sama, have you been listening at all!?”

“.....Oh, that means, he did say it? Is that right?”

For some reason Mary seemed rather shy, and she continued rather hesitantly.

“It’s so embarrassing. No way, to have Katarina-sama herself hear such a thing.....”

“Oh, so he did say it..... Huh? Me?”

“Yeah, I mean, are you really listening? I told Alan what Katarina-sama said, about me having a green thumb.”

“Eh? You said that to him yourself? Moreover, exactly what I said?”

“Yeah, hearing something like that from Katarina-sama, I was really happy, so I also told it to Prince Alan.”

As she said so, her cheeks were flushed red.

.....So, what does that mean. Since Mary told Prince Alan first that I praised her green thumb for being a special existence, Prince Alan never got the chance to say “Mary, you and your green thumb are a special existence.”

And then Prince Alan didn’t have anything else to say. I had already said it. I’m sorry, Prince Alan.

After that, it seems that Mary still has a favorable impression of Prince Alan, but not that kind of favor..... I’m really sorry, Prince Alan.

.....Well, since they are still connected by an engagement, you should still have a chance to make her realize the charm of a prince. Good luck, Prince Alan.

It seems that, since I was looking off into the distance, Mary was worried and asked me, “is your stomach alright?” She’s really such a good ojousan.

Since I’ve already interfered with you two’s happiness, I truly hope you can find happiness.

I can’t act as a go-between for the two of them anymore, but decided to cheer for them softly in my heart.

And then, a few weeks later. I was harvesting the last of the vegetables from the field.

“Ojou-sama, the prince is here to see ojou-sama about something!”

For some reason, Anne looked to be in a panic.

“Really Anne, why are you so panicked. Since it’s Prince Jared, isn’t it fine if he just comes here to find me like usual?”

As for Jared, at first we greeted him solemnly each time, after three days like this, Jared himself said “you don’t have to greet me like this,” and would usually come find me by himself.

He’s gotten completely used to my appearance in workwear, so there’s no need to change my clothes to welcome him anymore. So, there’s no reason to panic just because the prince has come.

“That’s not it. Ojou-sama. It’s not Prince Jared.”

“.....Huh?”

What are you saying, Anne. There’s no party or anything today, so there shouldn’t be any princes visiting me apart from Prince Jared. I pulled up a well-grown cucumber.

“Prince Jared’s younger brother, the fourth prince, Prince Alan has come!”

“.....Huh.”

Involuntarily, I dropped the cucumber on top of the soil.

“.....Why?”

“I don’t know why he’s here, but he’s here to meet Katarina-sama.”

Somehow, I had a premonition that something really bothersome was about to occur.

I dashed back to the mansion, and changed into ojou-sama clothes with Anne’s help before heading to the guest room to meet Prince Alan.

Then I went to the guest room in a hurry, and there was a boy with a self-important attitude slouching on a chair.

“You kept me waiting.”

This boy, didn’t even greet me properly in my own home, and with such an attitude. He’s got such a terrible attitude. By reflex, my cheeks began convulsing. “How dare you visit unannounced with that kind of attitude” is what I’d like to retort with, but..... He is just an eight year old child. I have the mental age of seventeen + nine, and am a good adult. That’s what I tell myself.

“I am so very sorry. I took too much time to get ready. My name is Katarina Claes.”

“I’m Alan Stuart.”

I greeted him like an adult, and with a smile, but Alan once again only had a self-important attitude.

Alan Stuart. Since he is a capture target, he’s quite handsome indeed. But, he doesn’t resemble his twin Jared. If Jared is an orthodox handsome prince type with blonde hair and blue eyes, Alan’s handsomeness has a wild streak to it, with his silver hair and blue eyes.

However, even though he is so handsome..... He’s such a self-important brat. It was just like the selfish spoiled Katarina before my memory returned.

Even though Jared is also a prince, he isn’t this self-important. Although Jared’s game character was always thinking something unknown on the inside, on the surface he was always calm and humble.

That’s what I was thinking as I observed the selfish Prince Alan.

“Katarina Claes. I came today because I have something to say to you.”

The selfish prince turned a sharp gaze on me for some reason.

“.....Uh. What would that be?”

Honestly, I have no idea what Alan would want with me. Well, I am Prince Jared's fiancée, but that shouldn't have anything to do with it.....

If it's just like the game then Alan should still be avoiding Jared. In particular, there shouldn't be any reason for him to come to my place.

"You know Mary Hunt, right?"

".....Eh, ah, yes."

Huh? Why is this about Mary?

"I heard from Mary that the two of you are very close."

".....Yes. We have a very good relationship."

Alan's gaze became even sharper. What is this, what does the prince want to say.

"Mary Hunt has become my fiancée. Did you know that?"

"Yes. I have been told."

"If you know, stop seducing her!"

".....What's this about seducing!?"

Alan glared at me with maximum power. I was so stunned that I couldn't speak.

No no, what are you talking about? This prince, is he okay? When did I seduce Mary..... He says I seduced Mary who is a fellow girl! For sure, Mary is really cute and gentle and I like her a lot, and would also like to get along with her from now on..... I want to have her, but I've never even considered getting married to her! I don't swing that way!

However, Alan ignored that I was stunned and continued to attack me.

"Are you just pretending not to know!? Whenever I invite her, she always says 'I promised to see Katarina-sama today' and rejects me, and



even when we are together she only talks about you! Everything about Mary is so pure, so it can't be anything other than you seducing her!"

"Hey, what is this! This is a false accusation!" I couldn't act like an adult anymore with Alan on a rampage and shouted right back at him.

"What do you mean, a false accusation? It's the truth! With such a face, you deceived such a pure Mary!"

This arrogant prince, has condemned me to villainy just because of my villainous face. What a disgusting jerk.

"There's no way that could be true! It's your fault for inviting Mary when she already promised to come over to my place! Besides, if you were really that attractive then she would go to see you whenever you invite her! You just lack appeal! And, she only talks about me because she finds you boring!"

".....Lack appeal..... Boring....."

I shouted at him in a fit of rage without thinking. Then, after shouting, I became startled. The Prince Alan before me seems to have frozen solid. ....This is bad. I've done it now. I've said some terrible things to him before I realized it. In the first place, this might be partly because I stole his lines..... However, once again, I can't take back what I've already said, so no use crying over spilled milk. I broke out into a cold sweat.

".....Hahahaha. This is the first time I've been made fun of to my face."

".....Uhh~. That was..... uh....."

Alan's face looked like it was about to explode at any moment. Ahh, I've said something irrevocable.

"I hope you're prepared, Katarina Claes. That rant, I'll take that as a challenge against me."

No, no, nothing of the sort. I didn't intend to challenge you. I just had a little slip of the tongue...

“Have a match with me.”

Alan loudly declared.

★★★★★★★★

“.....And, why did it become like this?”

Anne looked at me with a face full of disbelief. We were in the mansion’s garden, in front of the tallest tree.

“Well, Alan said something like ‘since you’re a woman, I’ll let you decide on the method of the match.’”

“.....Even if that’s so, for the prince of a country and a duke’s daughter..... To do something like tree climbing..... that’s so.....”

“I mean, the only thing that came to mind when I thought about what I was good at, was this...”

“No, in the first place, for Prince Alan. He’s definitely never done anything like climb a tree! He completely froze solid when you said tree climbing!”

“No, but he was the one who issued the challenge in the first place.....”

Indeed, when I suggested “tree climbing” for the method of our match, he completely froze solid. His mouth remained open and unmoving for a full ten seconds. However, when I asked him “perhaps you don’t know how to climb a tree?” he unfroze and retorted “no such thing! I accept your challenge!”

Thus, currently, standing in front of the tallest tree in the garden were me, Anne, Alan, and his servants. By the way, my clever and kind stepbrother, went off to distract my mother so that she wouldn’t find out about this commotion.

The match's rules are simple. Whoever reaches the top first wins. Alan stared at the tree with his mouth wide agape for a while, but seems to have become determined and rolled up his sleeves. However, Alan's servants were raising quite a fuss. Then, desperate comments like "prince, it's dangerous," and "please stop" were heard.

I had already changed into clothes that were easy to move in, and was fully prepared.

"Well then, Prince Alan. Are you ready?"

"I'm ready anytime."

"Then, we'll start at the servant's signal."

"O, Okay."

And then, with everyone watching, the match began.

And then, it finished immediately.

Of course, it was my overwhelming victory. I climbed the tree as smoothly as usual, and got to the top in just a few minutes.

However, as for Alan..... he's probably never even climbed a tree in the first place. While I was climbing, he was still hesitating at the first branch.

And so, I won the match overwhelmingly, but.....

"Prince Alan. With this, the match is over. Is that fine?"

Don't even think that a spoiled prince who's never even climbed a tree can possibly beat me who was known as a monkey in her past life! I aimed a triumphant smile at Alan. Then, Alan glared at me with a frustrated face.

".....It's not over yet....."

"Eh?"

“Let’s have another match! I just wasn’t used to it the first time.”

Alan just admitted that it was his first time. He indeed had never done it before. He should have said so from the beginning, how pretentious.

“Is that really alright? You won’t beat me so easily.”

“It’s exactly what I want!”

And so, Alan challenged me many times over, but..... The result was always the same. Well, it’s a natural conclusion.

And then he said.....

“I’m definitely going to win next time. Be prepared!”

Alan is really such a poor loser, and went away while declaring “I’ll be back.”

And so, I became Alan’s rival from then on.

### **13 – I changed the type of match**

From now on, Alan would keep coming to say “face me!” and I would always beat him with plenty of room to spare. It became that he would always come over to my place saying “let’s have a match!” and his days of losing continued.

As a result, since he comes over so frequently our relationship isn’t as bad anymore, having become friends, and in between matches we would often have a cup of tea together.

Moreover, recently Alan seems to be lively and quite happy even when he keeps losing. It’s probably just my imagination.

In this way, I was getting along well somehow.....

However, that day finally came.

“Jared!? Why are you here!?”

Jared and Alan had coincidentally met each other in the Claes family garden. Since Jared is coming over once every three days, and Alan is coming over once a week, it's no surprise that they have finally met here. Mary who was coming over more than Alan at the rate of twice a week, had already greeted Jared.

By the way, I had already talked with Jared a little about Alan coming over here to have matches with me. However, I never told Alan about Jared coming over here every three days. I thought he would have known already that I am Jared's fiancée, but.....

Alan looked quite hostile towards Jared, but also seemed to be hesitant on getting the story out of Jared.

Thus, since the brothers never really interacted with each other, they didn't know each other's schedules and happened to run into each other by chance at my place today.

“You're saying such a weird thing. Since this is my fiancée's family, coming over here isn't anything strange at all.”

Jared replied with a smile. That's true, it's like that, but I think you coming over once every three days is too much..... Or, I wonder, is it common for that to be the norm over here.

“.....Anyways, since I came over here to have a match with her today, don't interfere!”

Alan didn't have as much spirit as usual. I wonder what happened to his usual self-important aura.

Seeing Alan's strange condition, the perceptive Jared smiled as if to say he detected Alan trying to act tough.

“About this match, I’ve heard that you haven’t won even once after all these times? Wouldn’t it be better if you just gave up already?”

Jared said so with very cold eyes for some reason. I’m sure that he’s usually indirect with me..... being so direct like that... I timidly looked at Alan to see if he was about to explode with anger –

He didn’t seem to be angry..... Instead, he had a very bitter expression.

“.....N, no!! The match isn’t over yet! Even I can do it! Even I can..... Even I can.....”

Somehow Alan’s voice became rather pained as he shouted out in desperation.

Man, it seems that Alan can’t see anything other than Jared’s reflection. There was an indescribable atmosphere in the Claes garden.

Aw, awkward..... I feel like I’m half-involved in this as well... This atmosphere is so awkward. Okay, I should change the topic here to clear the air.

And so, in order to dispel the strange atmosphere, I proposed an idea that I had been thinking about recently.

“.....Uh, uhh Prince Alan. If it’s alright with you, how about we change the type of match? If we climb the tree too much, mother will surely find out eventually and become angry with me.”

In truth, it was a miracle already that mother had not discovered our tree climbing matches yet, but I was getting a dangerous feeling about it. Also, not only had mother ordered me to stop climbing trees, if it was found out that even the prince was tree climbing, lightning would surely strike me. Whenever Alan visits, since my dependable little brother Keith always accompanies her, it seems that mother is beginning to suspect something is going on. If I don’t change the type of match here, things will get really bad.

“.....If it’s something like that..... Then, what do you want to compete in?”

“.....Hmm~.”

Alan finally looked at me. The awkward atmosphere from earlier faded a little. Thank goodness, thank goodness.

However, for me to have brought up changing the type of match myself.....

Honestly, my magic is so shabby, and my academics are only average, so the truth is that there’s not much I can compete in. Or maybe, I should lose to Alan once on purpose so that he will be finally satisfied. But, that would be so frustrating.

As I was saying “Hmm~, hmm~,” while shaking my head, one of Alan’s servants spoke up.

“Um, how about something like a board game, since there’s no risk of injury?”

Indeed, if it’s a board game, there won’t be any risk of injury, and there won’t be any gender difference either..... However, during my previous life, I was bad at things like card games and Othello. While chess is popular here, I’m even worse at it. It’s not that I can’t play it, but to lose would be so frustrating.

Upon seeing my dissatisfied appearance, the servant seems to have realized that this is no good.

“Well then, how about music? The person that gives the better performance is the winner.”

He proposed a new idea. Music instruments, eh..... By the way, since being able to play instruments seems to be related to noble status, I have been taught how to play the piano and violin since I was little. In my previous life I played the recorder and the piano but never did any

performances, and currently I only play the piano a little. As for the violin..... Unfortunately, it wasn't for me.

"I'll, be fine with the piano."

I replied energetically and Alan agreed as well.

And so, the match changed from tree climbing, to a piano performance showdown.

It suddenly became a more noble-like match. Even if mother found out about it, lightning wouldn't strike me.

And next to the relieved me, were Alan's servants who seemed to be overjoyed that "the tree climbing is finally over, how wonderful." The servant that proposed the board game and music competition ideas was praised as "well done" by the other servants.

And so, everyone moved into the piano room for the piano showdown with peace of mind.

The Claes family piano is really grand, befitting that of a duke's. It gave off a much more high-class feeling than the one in the music classroom at school from my previous life. The judges for our performances would be Alan's servants and my servants, and we also asked Jared to judge us as well. And so it was decided that I would perform first, followed by Alan.

I went to the piano and sat down on the piano chair. In my previous life I could only play the "Flea Waltz," but now I can also play practice pieces for children. I made several mistakes, but I still think I did pretty well overall. In fact, Jared was shocked, saying "Katarina can play the piano?" Is that a compliment?



And, subsequently, Alan began playing the piano. For the sake of fairness, he was playing the same children's song as me. And it was supposed to be the same song..... but it rang throughout the room like a completely different tune. Starting from me, everyone in the room held their breath. That was how amazing Alan's performance was. I was enthralled by the performance. I thought he was just a self-important prince, but I'm very surprised to find out he has such a talent. And then, after his performance ended, the applause that did not occur after my performance filled the room.

"That was amazing. Prince Alan. You're so amazing."

I said that by instinct. Honestly, even though I don't know very much about music, I thought it was great to listen to. However, Alan himself had a stiff face.

"It wasn't such a big deal."

"Nothing of the sort. Isn't it a great talent?"

".....Something of that extent isn't what I can call talent."

For some reason, when I praised him, his face became even stiffer. And then –

"As you say Katarina, it was quite amazing."

Jared praised the performance just like I did.

".....Even though you don't think that at all."

Alan practically spat that out. His face had the same terribly bitter expression as before.

"Stop giving me compliments you don't mean! I'm sure you're only here to make fun of me that can't do anything!"

Alan shouted. Then, he ran out of the room almost as if he was being chased by something.

Exactly, what on earth is going on..... When he escapes so agitatedly, it really gives off the impression that something is chasing him.

While giving the stunned servants a contemptuous glance, I chased after Alan like the heroine of a shoujo manga.

It seems to be true that when a person is looking to escape, they will go to a familiar place. Alan was under the tree that we always climbed for our matches. As I approached, Alan raised his head a little, but after seeing that it was me, he lowered it again.

“.....Did you also come to laugh at me?”

“Huh?”

Alan muttered, but I didn't understand what he meant at all. What does it mean, he thinks I came to laugh at him. That doesn't seem like anything pleasant.

“.....Surely you came here to laugh at me for being able to play the piano a little.”

“.....Saying that you can only play the piano a little..... I don't think it's on the level of only being a little. It's an amazing talent.”

When Alan showed off how well he could play the piano, I thought he would be all self-important like usual, but he's actually being quite humble. Comparing that to my performance, it would be like ranking down my so-so performance to worthlessness.

“Such flattery. I can't do anything anyways. Always second to Jared.”

I thought he was a self-important prince, but he's actually a negative prince instead.

“.....But it's not just flattery..... Prince Alan, why is that you won't believe in yourself more?”

“Hmm. Ever since I was born, I was always being compared to Jared, and I can’t beat him in anything, no matter what it is. Jared took all the good parts starting from our birth, and I’m only ever left with his leftovers, how am I supposed to have self-confidence?”

Ohh, I get it. Come to think of it, this was also the game setting. Ever since they were born, Alan was always compared with Jared and couldn’t win in anything. No matter how hard he desperately tried, Jared could always beat him with a cool face.

Certainly in such a situation, it wouldn’t be easy to simply tell him to work hard and have self-confidence.

After all, in the game, even the kind and cute Mary couldn’t save him.

But Alan has never been inferior. In the game, his academic grades have always been top class. His brother Jared was just too much of a superman. And, his piano performance just now was really impressive. Alan might just have a talent for music. Indeed, in the game there was even a great scene where Alan played the violin to the heroine. I think he probably has more talent than Jared in music. Therefore –

“.....I don’t think it’s a question of being suitable or not.”

“.....What do you mean?”

Uh oh. I’ve said it now. Alan is looking at me intently.

“Well, uh..... Prince Jared has things that he is good and bad at, so Prince Alan surely also has things that you are good at, it’s natural that people will be more suited to some things than others.”

I became a bit flustered, but somehow I explained it.

“Being suited or unsuited..... Then, is there anything that Jared’s bad at? I’ve never heard of anything.”

Indeed, it appeared that there was nothing that the genius Jared could not do skillfully. He is very good at swordsmanship, and his head just as

good. He should have been like this when he came over to visit me.....  
He even helped me harvest the field, clearly with more efficiency than me.

There isn't anything that he can't do, he shouldn't have anything that he's bad at. That's what I always thought. However.....

"Hahahaha. I know what Jared's weak at!"

"!?"

I laughed fearlessly.

In fact just recently, I realized what Jared's not good at. Or maybe it's better to say discovered.

Even I thought at first that Jared was an absolutely perfect prince with no weaknesses. However, as time passed by, while harvesting the field, I only became aware of it because our meetings turned into something similar to a neighborhood women's meeting.

"Prince Jared's weakness, is, well."

".....Is?"

When I saw Alan waiting with bated breath, I smiled wickedly.

It's a story that happened a few weeks ago. On that day, both Jared and Mary had come over, and I was harvesting the vegetables to share with everyone. Jared offered to help me, and Mary and Keith also took some vegetables. Something passed by my foot, and went towards Mary, while I thought "oh, what a surprise."

Then, Jared who was close to me had ran off. He was usually so calm and composed, this was my first time seeing such a panicked expression. And then, I realized. Could it possibly be, that this was Jared's weakness.

While I was smiling wickedly at Alan, I saw Jared coming over to look for us as we had not returned for quite some time. This is a chance. I think this might be his weakness, but let's try it out since I'm not for certain.

And so, I grabbed the thing in my pocket that had been concealed for several days. I had been waiting for an opportunity to try it out sometime. I had Alan hide behind the tree so he could watch Jared's reaction.

And then, I threw "that" in front of Jared as he walked towards me.

"AHH!?"

When "that" suddenly appeared in front of him, Jared let out a loud scream.

And then, his face seemed rather panicked and scared, without any of the usual calm, collected feeling.

"There's no mistake now."

I gloated by reflex towards the tree's shade.

"Oi, I told you if you waited a little here you could see what Jared's weakness was. And now, exactly what will you do?"

Because Alan had been doubting me, I was rather proud of myself.

"That's a snake."

"Snake!?"

"Although I say that, it's a fake one. I can't put a real one in my pocket since it would move around too much."

".....No, I don't think it's a question of putting a snake in your pocket..... So uh, why did you just throw it?"

"That way, I can show you what Prince Jared's weakness is."

“His weakness is something like..... snakes!?”

“That’s right. I had my suspicions before, but his reaction just now confirmed it for me. Prince Jared’s weakness is definitely snakes.”

I told him loudly. This was such a great discovery. I finally found a chink in the armor of that perfect prince.

By the way, the fake snake that I threw was something I made out of some crumpled paper. I prepared it to experiment with Jared’s possible weakness. It still doesn’t quite look like the real thing, but the result was quite admirable.

“His weakness is something like snakes..... No, he definitely looked very scared..... I definitely thought such a thing wouldn’t be possible..... But something like a snake..... No, but he had such an amazing panicked look.....”

For some reason Alan began talking to himself while I was just jumping up and down in joy next to him. I’ve discovered Jared’s weakness. This is in case of emergency – it will surely come in useful if I reach a destruction end.

While I was jumping with joy, I did not notice the dark presence approaching me from behind.

“Katarina. You seem to be in very high spirits. Whatever could have happened?”

“!?”

Looking behind me, Jared was standing there with a beautiful smile. He was holding my toy snake firmly in his hands. While he was smiling, his eyes had no laughter to them.

“.....Pr, Prince Jared.”

“I was worried about you two since neither of you had returned after quite a while, but what on earth is this, I wonder.”

As he said so, he set the toy snake he was holding down in front of me.

“Eh, uh, that’s.....”

Without him even saying any more forceful words, I already panicked. Oh no, I was thinking to try this out light-heartedly, but I’ve angered Jared more than I thought I would. And even though he shouldn’t have seen me do it, he seems to be convinced that it was me. Why is that.

“Katarina became nine years old last month, right?”

“.....Yes.”

“It’s inconceivable that a nine year old daughter of a duke would throw such a toy at her fiancée, isn’t it?”

“.....Uhh.”

Jared’s smile seems to be getting even darker. ....This is so scary. It couldn’t be, I might be exiled like this for the crime of “throwing a toy snake at the prince...”

“Come to think of it, I haven’t seen Duchess Claes today, what would she happen to be doing?”

“...Ah, she should be having tea with Keith right now.”

Since I was confused by the sudden change of topic, I answered without thinking. Then, Jared began grinning devilishly.

“Is that so, I absolutely must go to greet her. I want to tell her about the tree climbing matches with Alan, and about Katarina throwing a toy at me.”

“!?”

What!? He's going to get revenge on me by selling me out to mother for throwing a toy snake at him! He is indeed a sadistic prince, such a terrible guy.

And then, I begged and chased him desperately as the evil sadistic prince made his way towards my mother. However, he only responded with a wide smile and much sarcasm. Ahh, I've angered someone that I shouldn't have. From behind the despairing me, I felt like I heard a voice, and when I stopped chasing Jared and looked back by reflex I saw Alan that I had completely forgotten about – he was laughing so hard that he could barely stand. The way he looked laughing while holding his stomach was actually pretty funny.

This Alan, he's actually laughing at the misfortune of others..... Well, it's what I deserved, but still.....

But, I didn't have the spare time to mind Alan right now. I chased desperately after Jared.

However, I had no way to stop the angry Jared.

He told mother about me hiding the tree climbing matches from her, and throwing a toy snake at him..... I received several straight hours of lecturing.

However, this incident was not a total disaster. I also got a big harvest. I found Jared's weakness! In an emergency, if I'm facing the destruction end where I'll be cut down by Jared's sword, I'll throw a toy snake at him, and take the opportunity to escape while he's panicking. It's perfect. After all, I'm quite the strategist. Before I have to attend school, I'll complete a toy snake that looks much more realistic, and keep it hidden in my pocket at all times!

And in this way I discovered another wonderful method to avoid a destruction flag.



By the way, after that, for some reason Alan didn't challenge me to any more matches.

However, he would still visit me, even without the matches, for whatever reason..... Moreover, somehow he's begun speaking normally with Jared as well. Why is that.....

While it was something I minded a bit, I don't have the time to care about that right now! In case I need to defeat Jared one day, I absolutely have to make a much more realistic toy snake.

## **14 – Being born as the fourth prince**

I was born as the fourth prince of this country, and Alan Stuart is my name. I have an older twin brother, the third prince Jared Stuart.

I spent the years right after I was born mostly in bed as I had a terribly weak constitution. I grew up being loved and raised by mother and my nanny and everyone gently.

When my health finally improved, I earnestly began my swordsmanship and academic studies, and I worked desperately hard in order to catch up to my older brothers due to the delay. And then, all my teachers praised me as amazing, honestly, I was getting a bit carried away.

However, I realized something when I had my first academic lecture together with Jared.

The problems that I had to spend so much effort on in order to solve, Jared would always solve quickly with a cool face.

It was the same way during swordsmanship training. While I was just barely hanging in there desperately, Jared would always defeat me as if his opponent was only a baby.

I'm worse than Jared. And by quite an amount..... I finally realized that.

My academic and my swordsmanship teachers tried to comfort me by saying that Jared was special, and that losing to him is unavoidable, from then on, I refused to learn alongside Jared anymore. Then, I became distant from Jared.....

And then one day, I heard this.

“What is Prince Alan doing now, all by himself.”

“Isn’t it unavoidable since he was so sickly and was bedridden for a long time, there’s no helping it.”

“Anyways, even though they’re twins, it’s pitiful that there’s such a difference between them.”

“Indeed, it seems like Prince Jared took all the good parts starting from birth.”

“Haha, taking all the good points, leaving only the leftovers, eh.”

“Oi oi, that’s going too far.”

The castle servants were joking about me while laughing in such a manner. I felt like everything was going dark before my eyes. I forgot to even blame them for their rudeness right in front of me.....

The words “Prince Jared took all the good parts starting from birth” were like unremovable thorns stuck in my chest.

After hearing it once, I realized..... It seemed like that was being whispered everywhere.

My swordsmanship teacher, my academic teachers, all the servants seemed to be saying it.....

No matter how hard I worked..... Jared got further and further above me with a cool face.

Before I noticed, I had become filled with an inferiority complex towards Jared.

However, no matter how conscious I was of Jared, Jared had no interest whatsoever in me, he didn't see me at all..... That made me even more frustrated, I felt bitter..... And then I distanced myself from Jared even more..... Even so, my frustration and bitterness only increased.

I heard that Jared got engaged in the spring that we turned eight. That he himself initiated the engagement with a powerful duke's daughter was the topic of the castle.

And from then on, it became my turn to get engaged. Of course, I was unable to decide it for myself like Jared did. The nobles were clamoring for my attention as I was still a single prince with no fiancée.

And then, my fiancée that was decided by politics turned out to be Mary Hunt. Luckily, she's a very lovely girl. She has auburn-colored long eyelashes, and large eyes, almost doll-like. The way she tried hard to greet me in such a tiny voice was also pretty lovely. Since I'm the youngest, if I can get a cute sister like her, I'll be pretty happy.

And then, she showed me the courtyard garden that she was taking care of. It was such a beautiful garden. When I praised the amazing garden, Mary smiled.

When I saw Mary like that, I remembered a book titled "The Girl with the Green Thumb," that I read the other day. It was a story about a girl who could grow plants extremely well, a girl with a green thumb. Ah, Mary also has a green thumb. I tried to relate Mary to this story.

"The other day, I was told that I have a green thumb, and that it's an amazing special existence."

"....."

It was almost as if Mary could read my mind, she said the words I wanted to say before I had a chance, I don't even know what to say next.

"Recently, I became friends with Katarina-sama, who told me so the other day."

Her face was flushed, and Mary seemed to be staring off into space as she remembered that moment, her expression was just like that of a maiden in love.

Feeling completely left behind, I just replied "ah" in response. However, compared to me that only returned appropriate responses for the situation, Mary only talked about her Katarina-sama passionately.

And from then on, whenever I met with Mary, she would only talk about her Katarina-sama passionately every time. What's more, whenever I invited Mary to tea, she always said "I promised to visit Katarina-sama today," and rejected me.

Heck, what on earth is this person called Katarina supposed to be? While my dissatisfaction was increasing, I found out her identity soon enough.

Katarina Claes. The only daughter of the Claes family, and she also seems to be Jared's fiancée.

Jared takes everything from me with his cool face.

This time even Jared's fiancée Katarina, is trying to steal Mary from me.....

Everything went dark before my eyes again. And, before I realized it, I was riding on a horse-drawn carriage towards the Claes mansion.

The girl that arrived late to the guest room introduced herself as Katarina Claes. She has light blue eyes and tawny hair. I've heard that she's the same age as me.

Although she's not ugly, her tight, upturned light blue eyes gave off quite the intense impression for a girl. Since she's Jared's fiancée, and Mary is always praising her, I thought she would be quite a beauty..... I feel like I've been completely had.

To Katarina Claes, I immediately mentioned Mary.

"Mary Hunt has become my fiancée. Did you know that?"

"Yes. I have been told."

The way Katarina said it as if it wasn't anything to her irritated me.

"If you know, stop seducing her!"

".....What's this about seducing!?"

Katarina's light blue eyes were wide open. Her attitude was one of not even remembering what she herself had done. I naturally became even more irritated and began shouting.

"Are you just pretending not to know!? Whenever I invite her, she always says 'I promised to see Katarina-sama today' and rejects me, and even when we are together she only talks about you! Everything about Mary is so pure, so it can't be anything other than you seducing her!"

"Hey, what is this! This is a false accusation!"

Katarina's already upturned eyes turned up even further.

"What do you mean, a false accusation? It's the truth! With such a face, you deceived such a pure Mary!"

"There's no way that could be true! It's your fault for inviting Mary when she already promised to come over to my place! Besides, if you were really that attractive then she would go to see you whenever you

invite her! You just lack appeal! And, she only talks about me because she finds you boring!”

“.....Lack appeal..... Boring.....”

I lost my speech involuntarily.

Indeed, up until now, I had a hard time of it because everyone said behind my back that Jared took all the good parts..... This was the first time someone had foolish enough to make fun of me to my face. It was so outrageous, laughter welled up from within me.

“.....Hahahaha. This is the first time I’ve been made fun of to my face.”

“.....Uhh~. That was..... uh.....”

“I hope you’re prepared, Katarina Claes. That rant, I’ll take that as a challenge against me.”

And then I loudly declared it towards Katarina.

“Have a match with me.”

Exactly, how has it become like this. Standing in front of the tree, I was thinking. Indeed, I had just challenged Katarina Claes to a match.

If the other party was also a boy, it would have been a duel with swords, but I challenged a girl. For that reason, I let Katarina pick the type of match.

So, I thought it would be a board game like chess, but.....

“Then, let’s do tree climbing!”

Katarina, said something I’m not familiar with hearing. Tree climbing? What’s that? I know the words but, I’ve never seen it in action.....

Up until now, in my eight years of life, I've never done such a thing. In the first place, not even the commoner kids do this, and I've never seen a noble child climb a tree.

However, when I was asked "perhaps you don't know how to climb a tree?" my manly pride caused me to involuntarily say "no such thing! I accept your challenge!"

And now, I was standing in front of the tallest tree in the garden along with Katarina.

By the way, the rules are simple, whoever reaches the top first wins. For sure, it will be easy to tell who's better.

However, since I've never climbed a tree before in my life, I don't even know how to start. But, since I've accepted the match, I can't back down. I prepared myself, and rolled up my sleeves.

"Well then, Prince Alan. Are you ready?"

"I'm ready anytime."

"Then, we'll start at the servant's signal."

"O, Okay."

And then, with everyone watching, the match began.

And then, it finished immediately.

The result was a crushing defeat. Since I didn't know in the first place how to begin climbing a tree, and what to do after that, I was stopped at the first branch in confusion.

And then, I watched in disbelief as Katarina climbed the tree smoothly like a monkey, and reached the top in no time. Why is it that Katarina, the daughter of a duke, is so good at climbing trees.....?

“Prince Alan. With this, the match is over. Is that fine?”

However, since Katarina had such a smug look on her face – I involuntarily said something.

“.....It’s not over yet.....”

“Eh?”

“Let’s have another match! I just wasn’t used to it the first time.”

“Is that really alright? You won’t beat me so easily.”

“It’s exactly what I want!”

However, no matter how many times I challenged her, I couldn’t beat Katarina who climbed trees with great speed just like a monkey.

For that reason, I decided to challenge her again at a later date.

A few weeks after I had begun challenging Katarina. I noticed something several times as I was challenging Katarina.

It’s that Katarina is always serious. She never went easy on me just because I’m a prince. And, she always looked right at me.

I’ve never challenged anyone seriously like this until now.

And always, no matter how hard I worked, I couldn’t take my eyes off my brother Jared.....

Katarina’s unwavering eyes and serious attitude healed the pain in my chest a little. Without realizing it, I began to consider it fun just to go visit Katarina.

However, that day finally came.



“Jared!? Why are you here!?”

When my brother appeared at the Claes mansion, I instinctively rose my voice.

“You’re saying such a weird thing. Since this is my fiancée’s family, coming over here isn’t anything strange at all.”

Jared replied with his usual composed smile. Certainly, it was as he said, so I had no reply for him.

And, without realizing it, I was surprised to find that I had somehow forgotten about the fact that Katarina is Jared’s fiancée.

“.....Anyways, since I came over here to have a match with her today, don’t interfere!”

“About this match, I’ve heard that you haven’t won even once after all these times? Wouldn’t it be better if you just gave up already?”

Jared’s eyes were very cold as he said that.

The phrase “Prince Jared took all the good parts” began to reverberate in my head again.

“.....N, no!! The match isn’t over yet! Even I can do it! Even I can..... Even I can.....”

Don’t look down on me! Don’t make a fool out of me! I felt that everything was going dark before me again.....

Even though my chest had been feeling lighter lately, the usual heavy feeling hit me again. This is bad..... I feel terrible.....

“.....Uh, uhh Prince Alan. If it’s alright with you, how about we change the type of match? If we climb the tree too much, mother will surely find out eventually and become angry with me.”

Abruptly, I heard Katarina’s voice and saw her idiotic face. Just by looking at that face, the heavy feeling in my chest faded a little.

Katarina proposed to change the match from tree climbing to a piano performance showdown.

I moved to the piano room, and the showdown began.

Katarina went first and performed a children's song. Katarina played while making many small mistakes.

And then, it was my turn to play the piano. When my performance ended, everyone in the room was clapping. Katarina raised her voice in excitement.

"That was amazing. Prince Alan. You're so amazing."

Katarina praised me just like the teachers in the castle did. Surely, this was also mere flattery.

"It wasn't such a big deal."

"Nothing of the sort. Isn't it a great talent?"

".....Something of that extent isn't what I can call talent."

Indeed, I did find music to be more fun than swordsmanship or academics, and it was something I was good at, but..... A great talent..... I have no such thing. I have the leftovers while Jared took all the good parts. No matter what I do, I'm no match for Jared.....

"As you say Katarina, it was quite amazing."

Jared said so with his usual fake smile.

My brother that can do anything is surely trying to make a fool out of me. The world around me went dark yet again. The pain in my chest that had faded returned once again.

".....Even though you don't think that at all. Stop giving me compliments you don't mean! I'm sure you're only here to make fun of me that can't do anything!"

It's intolerable for me to be in the same spot as Jared any longer. Everyone will only make a fool out of me.

Before I realized it, I was running out of the room.

I was just running around blindly, and before I realized it I was underneath the tree where I always challenged Katarina.

After a while, I detected someone's presence standing beside me. I thought for sure that it would be a servant coming to check on how I was doing, but instead it was Katarina for some reason. I muttered something involuntarily.

".....Did you also come to laugh at me?"

"Huh?"

".....Surely you came here to laugh at me for being able to play the piano a little."

".....Saying that you can only play the piano a little..... I don't think it's on the level of only being a little. It's an amazing talent."

"Such flattery. I can't do anything anyways. Always second to Jared."

This girl named Katarina seems different from the people in the castle somehow, but it's probably still the same. Boring flattery. And then, definitely laughing at me behind my back. I already know very well that I'm no good. I mean, since everyone keeps saying so.....

".....But it's not just flattery..... Prince Alan, why is that you won't believe in yourself more?"

"Hmm. Ever since I was born, I was always being compared to Jared, and I can't beat him in anything, no matter what it is. Jared took all the good parts starting from our birth, and I'm only ever left with his leftovers, how am I supposed to have self-confidence?"

As I mocked myself, it seemed that even Katarina became silent for a while, but.....

“.....I don't think it's a question of being suitable or not.”

This girl really won't shut up easily.

“.....What do you mean?”

I questioned her while glaring.

“Well, uh..... Prince Jared has things that he is good and bad at, so Prince Alan surely also has things that you are good at, it's natural that people will be more suited to some things than others.”

“Being suited or unsuited..... Then, is there anything that Jared's bad at? I've never heard of anything.”

Jared can do anything easily with a cool face. Despite living in the same castle as him, from the time since he was born, I haven't even heard of something such as a food he dislikes. He's impeccably perfect, that's Jared. He's different from me with his leftovers.

However –

“Hahahaha. I know what Jared's weak at!”

“!?”

Katarina laughed rather triumphantly.

“Prince Jared's weakness, is, well.”

“.....Is?”

I involuntarily held my breath.

Jared came looking for us since we hadn't returned for quite some time. Then, aiming in front of Jared, Katarina threw something.

“AHH!?”

Suddenly, Jared screamed at whatever it was that was thrown in front of him. This is the first time in my life that I’ve seen him panicking like this.

“Oi, I told you if you waited a little here you could see what Jared’s weakness was. And now, exactly what will you do?”

I had gotten close to Katarina by reflex upon seeing how distraught Jared was. Once again, Katarina had such a triumphant expression.

“That’s a snake.”

“Snake!?”

I was shocked at the unexpected answer.

“Although I say that, it’s a fake one. I can’t put a real one in my pocket since it would move around too much.”

“.....No, I don’t think it’s a question of putting a snake in your pocket..... So uh, why did you just throw it?”

“That way, I can show you what Prince Jared’s weakness is.”

“His weakness is something like..... snakes!?”

“That’s right. I had my suspicions before, but his reaction just now confirmed it for me. Prince Jared’s weakness is definitely snakes.”

Katarina told me in a loud voice. I don’t know why, but she looked so proud.

However..... Jared’s weakness is something like snakes..... This is something unexpected. I mean, that’s not the type of weakness I wanted to know, I wanted to know what he was bad at such as somewhere in swordsmanship or academics..... But really, something like snakes..... But..... That’s the first time I’ve ever seen Jared panicking like that.....

Honestly, at the time, he did look quite scared.

Also, Katarina threw a toy snake so proudly at the prince of a country.

I withdraw my earlier statement. As I expected, this girl named Katarina is completely different from the people in the castle. She's also different from other noble children. What a funny girl she is.

And then, while I was thinking to myself about all these things, Jared had caught Katarina without me noticing.

The angry Jared gradually approached Katarina. Well, it didn't feel like he was truly angry, but rather that he was pretending to be angry in order to play a joke on Katarina.

The Jared I know is constantly bored, and always puts on a fake smile. It's like he's not interested in anything at all. That's the way it felt.

And somehow, Jared has become serious due to Katarina throwing a toy snake at him, and is even pretending to be very angry. Is this really Jared? As I watched while stunned, it seems that Jared is going to tattle on Katarina about her wrongdoings to her mother.

Katarina's earlier smug look was quickly wiped and replaced as she turned pale.

In the first place, I have absolutely no idea why she seemed to be so proud earlier. Now she's desperately crying and apologizing to Jared.

While I pitied her just a little, but..... More than that, it's just too hilarious.

I couldn't stand it anymore and burst out laughing while holding my belly. I laughed so hard that tears came out.

This is the first time I've ever laughed this much.

After laughing hard enough to cry, I feel like something that's accumulated within me up until now flowed out of me with the tears – I could see everything clearly again, and my chest was light.

Before long, since Katarina was taken away by Duchess Claes, we went back to the castle.

When we arrived at the castle I suddenly called out to Jared.

“Even you have a weakness, eh.”

It felt rather unnatural to be talking to him, honestly, it’s been a really long time since I last talked to Jared.

And, Jared who usually kept a cool smile at all times, tilted his head slightly in response to my statement. It’s my first time seeing such an expression from him.

“It’s not really a weakness, I just happen to not like them very much.”

As he was saying so, his smile didn’t seem as composed as usual.

Isn’t it that you don’t like them very much because you’re weak with them? I found it somewhat amusing to see a different side to my brother that I thought was invincible.

“I thought you had no weaknesses, and that you could do anything.”

However, it wasn’t my belief alone. Due to all the talking behind my back, somehow without realizing it I made my closest relative into a threatening enemy. And, I couldn’t even see the real Jared. Even Jared has some things he’s not good at. Just like me.

Today, I was able to notice this entirely thanks to that strange girl.

“Anyways, as for things I’m bad at, there’s something that even I can’t do.”

“For example?”

It seemed like Jared wasn’t in his usual condition at the moment for some reason, he answered me with a wry smile.

“For example, predicting how Katarina Claes will act.”

“.....That is, indeed.....”

I instinctively gave a wry smile as well.

A girl that can climb a tree just like a monkey, as well as suddenly throw a toy snake at you, such a girl seems to be impossible to predict even for Jared.

Once again, I remembered that smug look Katarina had on her face when she tossed that toy snake in front of Jared.

I naturally loosened up. For the time being, just remembering that look on her face was so fun.

“Come to think of it, since your match with Katarina was interrupted today, are you going to go challenge her again?”

“Hmm~. That’s right. Somehow, I feel like there’s no need.”

Thinking upon it, I felt really good for some reason, and I didn’t even care about the matches anymore.

Until now, I had been so stubborn about winning, considering how obsessed I was, it’s unbelievable how calm I am now.

“Then, I guess you won’t be going to the Claes mansion anymore?”

“Eh, why would that be?”

By reflex, I gave Jared a blank look. I didn’t quite understand what Jared was trying to say.

“After all, if you’re not challenging her then there shouldn’t be a reason to go visit anymore.”

“.....No, that might be so, but.....”

Indeed, if I’m not going to challenge Katarina anymore, I won’t have a reason anymore to visit the Claes mansion, but..... I thought about the light blue eyes that always looked straight at me. She’s my brother’s



fiance, so they're connected by that, but if I couldn't go and visit that girl anymore... I felt that I really don't want that to happen.

As I was thinking about this, Jared came towards me with a rather serious face. It's also the first time for me to see this face as well.

"Well, that girl is my fiancée."

"??"

I know that already. Once again, Jared tilted his head slightly, and gave yet another wry smile.

"Don't you have any self-awareness? But, aren't you definitely going to pass me?"

Jared's smile turned fearless, then he left me and returned to his room quickly. While I don't really understand what he means, I watched his back as he left.

Up until now, just seeing him would make my chest hurt, but now, everything is fine.

While I haven't suddenly gotten to the point where I like Jared, it seems that no more dark feelings are welling up within me.

After Jared returned to his room, so did I. On the way there, I saw two trees side-by-side in the garden, and thought about that strange girl who was so good at climbing trees yet again.

Today, Katarina might be depressed right now because of how angry her mother is at her. Since I was the one who challenged her, I also feel partly responsible.

Next time, let's go to apologize.

Also, at that time let's take her favorite sweets to her as a gift.

I'm sure that like usual, she'll stuff her cheeks like a squirrel, and I smiled again by reflex as I imagined the way she looks with her mouth crammed full of food.

## **15 - I got a new hobby**

It's now the second summer I've experienced in this world since I recovered my memories. I'm ten now.

Last summer, my field wilted, and I was challenged many times by Alan, but this year has been peaceful so far.

My fiance Prince Jared, his brother Prince Alan, and Alan's fiancée Mary have been visiting me all the time, just like last year.

Instead of being in discord, I don't know why but, Jared and Alan were getting along normally.

And, Alan has begun focusing on piano and violin performances seriously, and he's even being called a poster child for being blessed by the god of music.

When I met Mary, she was a shy, nervous girl with no self-confidence, now she's already become quite the splendid lady. However, her admiration for me hasn't seemed to change.

The other day, Mary told me something like "if only I was a man, I'd marry Katarina-sama" with her cheeks flushed. Mary is so lovely.

By the way, I said to Mary "since you're Alan's fiancée, wouldn't it be good if you two spent more time together?" However, it was categorically rejected with "no way, then I'll get to spend less time with Katarina-sama!" Since she said it so bluntly, I won't say anything more on the subject.

As for my cute stepbrother Keith, he's living cheerfully without being a hikikomori shut-in. However, he's still become a ladies' man just like in the game, and is always saying "you have to treat girls gently and kindly."

By the way, my destruction flag countermeasures are proceeding smoothly as well.

Countermeasure against being cut down by Jared's sword –

In order to be able to flawlessly dodge his sword, I diligently practiced my swordsmanship, until my teacher said "just like this! Your movements are excellent!" I was able to pass with excellent grades. In addition, in order to distract Jared from cutting me, the toy snake had been completed –

I asked the head gardener Tom-san, who's known for being very good with his hands, to help me create an elaborate toy snake. With this, Jared will surely be scared for his life. Since it's made this well, maybe he'll even run straight out of town.

Countermeasure for being exiled out of the country by myself –

My strategy is to continue improving my magic so that I can get a magic-related job to take care of myself. After learning from my magic tutor for one year, my ultimate technique Earth Thud that started out at two, three centimeters, has improved all the way to fifteen centimeters. Soon, I should be able to look cool while calling out "Earth Barrier!"

By the way, Keith has completely mastered how to control his magic in this year, and can even manipulate the giant earth golem from that time skillfully.

I also really wanted to manipulate earth golems, but..... putting magic power into earth golems is surprisingly delicate work..... Unfortunately, since doing delicate work isn't my strong suit, I can't learn it.

My magic tutor told me, not only is the right amount of magic power necessary in order to use the right magic, but also magic sense. Magic is such a deep subject.

As such, as my fulfilling days went by, I picked up a new hobby besides tree climbing and taking care of my field recently.

My new hobby is reading. By the way, not hard books like history or economics. I'm talking about so-called romance novels.

At the current moment, there's a secret boom in these romance novels among all the girls. Meaning, that in noble society, it's a secret pleasure because these types of novels aren't allowed in public. By the way, the person who lent me the book I have now, is one of my maids who's sensitive to what's trendy.

I was splendidly hooked by the books I borrowed and got addicted.

Since I had lost my succulent living environment with anime and manga from the previous world, I fiercely devoured the stories here instead. These romance stories would typically be about being in love with a wonderful prince or knight, with beautiful stories of friendship. Honestly, it's not as good as the ones from my previous life, but..... Even so, I had completely gotten into my element as I got totally absorbed by these novels. By the way, the most popular story right now, is about a beautiful friendship between two girls, a princess and a commoner, titled "The Emerald Princess and Sophia."

And then the luckiest thing about it all was, unbelievably, mother understood and supported my new hobby. She was even willing to buy new books for me.

Anne said it was because that "she probably thinks it's better for you to be sitting at home quietly reading a book, rather than going outside....." Well, whatever the reason, I'm so happy that I can buy the books I want to read.

However, I have just one regret. It's that the maid that recommended these books to me, has gotten married and left our family. And so, I lost a comrade to talk about these romance novels with. Now, I have nobody to talk with about the novels.

In order to find a comrade, I tried to persuade Anne and Mary, but..... It seems that neither of them are interested in romance novels. How disappointing.

Ahh, I really want a fellow comrade. Let's look for one at the next tea party.

By the way, in a few days, Jared and Alan are planning to host a tea party at the castle. Since the princes themselves are hosting it, a great number of noble sons and daughters are going to attend. If so many people are going to be gathering, I might even find a comrade. I'm looking forward to the tea party.

★★★★★★★★★★

The tea party was held in a corner of the wide castle garden. The format was just like the one I participated in last time at Mary's home, a buffet format consciously mimics high society's dance parties.

As befitting of a tea party being hosted by royalty, this tea party is the largest one I've ever attended, with the most people as well.

There was always many people around us, and as the hosts Jared and Alan were kept extremely busy doing nothing but exchanging greetings with everyone at the beginning of the tea party.

I had already learned my lesson from my first tea party, that I can't eat too many sweets, so I was just sitting there gracefully drinking tea. However, as befitting of a royal tea party, the sweets are delicious, and the tea is delicious. There's also many different types. It's getting too

hard to suppress my desire. I saved one of each kind of sweet for myself for later, and there were so many different types of tea, that I had to drink a little of every type to taste all the different novel flavors.

However, as I had greatly improved at being a noble daughter, I gracefully told Keith and Mary who had been together with me as well, “excuse me” as I went to the restroom before I hit my limit –

A tragedy occurred along the way. While I was making my way towards the castle’s restroom – I encountered a watchdog that had escaped its chain. Honestly, I’m really bad with dogs. I’ve been hated by dogs ever since long ago. It’s something carried over from my previous life.

Most dogs become hostile the instant they see me as if they’ve just seen their mortal enemy.

On top of that, this watchdog was baring his fangs at me in order to intimidate me. However, all that happened was that our eyes met, how unreasonable. And so, my nemesis that wasn’t on a leash, was being belligerent towards me.

I might be able to repel something like a Chihuahua, but this opponent is Doberman-class, I highly doubt I can defeat it. I fled desperately while holding up my dress, and climbed a nearby tree.

Since my nemesis was unable to climb trees, it just barked at me threateningly for a while under the tree, until its owner noticed it was missing and called out for it, so it finally left me alone quietly.

It’s finally gone. With peace of mind, I tried to descend from the tree..... Replacing the dog that was under the tree, there was now several people there instead. I think it was about six or seven people, they were talking about something under the tree that I was in.

If I go down now, then it’ll be known that I climbed a tree.

Although it was a perfectly unavoidable incident, if it became a rumor that a duke’s daughter climbed a tree in the castle garden, it would be

bad..... I wished they would hurry up and move to a different place already.

However, I had just about completely reached my limit. In the first place, I was on my way to the restroom when I got chased by the dog, and a considerable amount of time has passed since I was forced up this tree. So, I'm..... My bladder has reached its limit.

Alright, there's no way around causing a fuss about me climbing a tree anymore. After all, it would be even more embarrassing if I caused an incident about wetting myself. I made up my mind, and descended the tree smoothly.

When I suddenly appeared, the people by the tree were all greatly surprised.

"Could you please let me pass?"

I asked the people that were gathered around the tree. They took up positions almost as if to surround me, and I won't be able to go to the restroom like this. My face was scowling a bit and my voice was awfully cold, but I didn't have the time to worry about that now.

Am I really that scary..... The people around me scattered quickly and fled like spiders. My feelings were a little hurt, they didn't have to run away like that – Did she react too late or something, there was still one girl remaining in front of me. Since she seems to have her back turned to the tree, she must have missed seeing me come down the tree.

I held my breath by instinct upon seeing what a beauty the remaining girl was. She had white hair with red eyes, and albino skin as pure white as snow, a truly beautiful girl.

I was lost in her beauty for a moment there, but the pressure on my bladder quickly brought me back to reality. If I don't get to a restroom soon, there will surely be a tragedy.

To the girl that was staring at me somewhat uneasily, I gave a smile to tell her not to be afraid, then I hurried off to find the restroom.

Somehow, I made it in time and avoided the worst possible consequence at this tea party, but I was really in danger of committing such a large blunder. I'm seriously considering bringing a portable toilet next time.

After I finished in the restroom and returned to the tea party safely, now I can't find Mary and Keith anywhere. There's just too many people here. While I was complaining to myself, and pinching the sweets that I haven't eaten before –

"Uh, uhh–"

I heard a voice from behind. When I looked back and wondered who it was, it turned out to be the girl from under the tree.

"Hello, you're from earlier."

"Y, yes. That's right."

The beauty nodded. Seeing her again, she really is so pretty. She's quite luscious even though I'm already used to seeing beautiful people like Jared. Her white hair is silky smooth, and her albino skin is as white as snow. Her red eyes shine in such contrast to her white skin.

It's almost as if she jumped straight out of a romance novel. That's right! She's just like Sophia from the popular novel "The Emerald Princess and Sophia." The commoner girl Sophia had beautiful silken black hair and snow-white skin. The princess that was exploring town while incognito was taken in by Sophia's beauty. This girl was really like the Sophia from the story. I was entranced by this girl.

"Uhh... just now..."

The girl's snow-white cheeks were dyed red. Ahh, the story's Sophia also had her cheeks flush red upon first meeting the Emerald Princess. Well, unfortunately, this girl isn't looking at a princess, but instead the noble girl villainess Katarina Claes.....



The story's princess said this to Sophia at their first meeting.

"Your hair is just like silk! I wonder if I may touch it just a little bit?"

".....Eh!?"

I noticed that the girl before me was considerably surprised. Oh no, I blurted out what I was thinking inadvertently!

The girl was quite shaken. After all, I'm no beautiful princess like in the story, if a girl with such a villainous face said that to you, it would be natural. She might even be scared of me.

"Um, that was, uh."

I tried desperately to think up of some excuse. Then, the shaken girl said something unexpected.

".....Emerald Princess!"

What's this!? Could it possibly be!? I instinctively grabbed the girl's shoulders and my face reddened.

"The Emerald Princess romance novel!! You know the story 'The Emerald Princess and Sophia!'"

I approached her like a demon and my momentum probably upset the girl even more as she just nodded. After that, I also named off some other romance novels, asking her if she knew of them, and the girl nodded at each one.

Such a thing! I've finally found my comrade in romance novels! And she's even just like a beauty right out of the story herself!

And then, while I was trembling in excitement –

"What are you doing, nee-san?"

I heard a questioning voice from my side. When I looked towards the source, I saw my stepbrother Keith and Mary looking at me with the same wondering eyes.

“.....What, you say...”

I saw my state for the first time. I was up close against the beauty, with my hands on her shoulders, while breathing roughly.

I was a splendid pervert.

“Ah, I’m really sorry.”

I quickly let go of her. I felt like everyone around me was looking at me dubiously. Ahh. I’m so sorry. I was so overjoyed that I lost my reasoning completely.

Come to think of it, I don’t even know this girl’s name yet. I haven’t introduced myself either. As a lady, this is quite a breach of etiquette.

I grasped the hems of my dress, and curtsied gracefully in greeting.

“I apologize for my earlier rudeness. I am Katarina Claes. I’ll be much obliged to be in your care.”

Being suddenly grabbed by a suspicious girl, and now being greeted, although the girl must be shaken badly, as expected of a noble daughter, she returned my greeting properly.

“.....I’m Sophia Ascarot.”

What’s this, I had just thought that she was like the Sophia in the story..... And if her name’s Sophia, this girl might even be the model for the story! My excitement meter was about to burst.

“Sophia-sama! If it’s alright with you, would you like to chat with me for a bit?”

I immediately gripped Sophia’s hands tightly and pressured her.

However, I was interrupted by a calm voice next to me.

“Nee-san. I’m sorry to interrupt you while you’re so excited, but the tea party has already ended. It’s time for us to return to the mansion.”

“!?”

What!? Even though I thought I’d finally found a comrade to discuss romance novels passionately with..... If that’s the case –

“Well then, Sophia-sama. Next time, won’t you please come over to play with me at my place?”

“.....Eh, uhh.....”

Once again, I grabbed tightly onto her hands and desperately pleaded until I was able to get confirmation from her that she would come visit. I did it~!

Just in case, I even decided on the exact date with her right now.

“Then, I’ll be waiting for you!”

Thus, I said goodbye to Sophia with a big smile on my face.

As such, I was finally able to discover a fellow comrade for romance novels at the tea party, moreover even successfully getting a beauty to promise to come and visit me!

And then, I grinned like a maniac during our trip back in the horse-drawn carriage, while Keith looked at me strangely for the whole way.

**Side story 1 – Working as the Claes family head gardener**

I, Tom Wesley, have been serving as the Claes family head gardener for a very long time now.

I was born in a poor rural village, once I grew up I started apprenticing myself, and ever since then I've been living while traveling from place to place wherever life takes me. By nature, I've never been good at speaking, on top of my face being a bit plain, I couldn't work well with others no matter where I went, so I always worked by myself in silence.

And so when I became a young man, since I was really good with tools, and I had a green thumb, before I realized it I'd become a gardener, and I began working for rich merchants and nobles.

Although I kept improving as a gardener, even so, I still couldn't interact with others well, which was very bad for me trying to make a living, people would always find a reason to fire me, or take away my salary, there was often nothing I could do about it.

During these days, that person appeared in front of me for the first time.

"Are you the one taking care of this garden?"

While I was working at a certain noble's garden, when I finished the work I was doing, I suddenly heard a voice beside me from a handsome young man that seemed to be around my age. From what he was wearing, I understood that he had a pretty high status, and I immediately paid my respects, but.....

"It's fine. So anyways, are you the one taking care of this garden?"

".....Yes."

I was working seriously and courteously as always, I nodded at him while wondering anxiously if I had dissatisfied him in some manner. The young man's light blue eyes were brilliantly sparkling.

"Every time I come here to visit, I'm always amazed at the terrible gardening sense here, but it's suddenly completely changed. You're very talented!"

“.....Th, thank you very much.....”

He was looking at me a little too directly, and I was confused.

“By the way, are you a retainer of this family?”

“.....No. I just got hired recently.”

“Then, are you working anywhere else right now?”

“.....No, there isn't anywhere else.”

Since I couldn't interact with others well, and I was bad at making a living for myself, I was never able to stay at any workplace long, and I was used to a lifestyle of changing jobs often.

“Then, I'd like for you to become my retainer and be my gardener.”

His eyes kept sparkling as he said so, and the young Duke Claes forcibly dragged me over to his mansion. He happened to be the family head of the previous generation, Duke Claes.

And so, even though I was pulled over here forcibly in the middle of my work by Duke Claes, I found his mansion to be a very comfortable place to work.

All the servants were nice people, I finally had a steady job that even included vacations, and the family head that had forcibly recruited me was a very friendly and approachable person.

He was liked by many of the servants, even those that were bad at interacting with others, and to the other servants and even to me who couldn't get close to others easily, he would always call out to us light-heartedly, and he would often go out to play in town while hiding his identity.

Just like that, one time I went with him to play in town while he was hiding his identity, and we completely became good friends, and we went to town together over and over again like that.

And so, before I realized it, even though he was the head of a family and a duke, and I was just a servant, he was calling me “friend,” at first I was extremely humbled by this, but I was finally affected by his feelings, and I finally began to think of him as a “friend” as well.

Since I was bad at interacting with others, and never knew what to say to people, he’s the first person that truly ever called me a “friend.”

While I was living beside this friend, and doing my best at work, and at the time I suddenly realized that I’ve become the head gardener –

My only friend unceremoniously passed away from an illness.

After that, I just spent my days idly. My friend that always called out to me and told me my garden was “wonderful,” was no longer here. I didn’t go anymore to the town that we used to visit together so much.

I wonder if he’ll call for me soon, I want to go to where he is as quick as possible..... I want to meet him again.....

As I was thinking about this every day, that girl appeared.

“I would really like to create a field in the garden!”

The way she seemed as her light blue eyes sparkled, was very similar to the day where I met him for the first time.

And so, that girl began to come see me every day.

“Tom-san, I’m here~”

Before I noticed it, the girl was always smiling at me like a friend. Even though there were still painful memories of my friend everywhere in town, I forced myself to go to town to buy the materials needed to help

her create a toy snake, and suddenly it became natural to go to town again.

And so, while I spent time with this girl, my feeling of wanting to see my friend as soon as possible disappeared.

“To my precious friend. I’m sorry, you’ll have to wait a little bit more for me after all. In exchange, when I finally do see you again, I’ll bring you a ton of interesting stories about your granddaughter.”

## **16 – I invited my friend**

It finally became the promised day, when Sophia would come to visit my place. I waited restlessly for her arrival since morning.

“Ojou-sama, Sophia-sama whom you have spoken about has arrived.....”

Anne told me about her arrival, but she seemed strange for some reason. However, I just thanked her and hurried to the guest room because I wanted to see Sophia again as quickly as possible.

And then, I went to the guest room –

Indeed, the beautiful Sophia was waiting there impatiently, but..... For some reason, there was also an incredibly handsome boy next to her.

With black hair and black eyes, his hair and eye color was different from Sophia, but it could be seen that his features were similar and they were related. And, with two such beautiful people in front of me, it was like lining up a pair of dolls.

Ahh, Anne’s expression was surely strange because she was by these two doll-like people.

While I was lost staring at the two beauties, the voice that snapped me back to reality, was the handsome boy’s.

“Thank you very much for inviting my sister. Since my sister almost never goes out by herself, I am accompanying her today. I’m her older brother, Nico.”

I thought they looked similar, and indeed, this handsome boy seems to be Sophia’s older brother. But even so, to accompany her whenever she goes out, she’s had such a sheltered life.

However, I’ve been under pretty strict guard in my own way as well. After all, whenever I go out, mother will say “take Keith with you. Listen to Keith, and absolutely don’t do anything weird.” So, Keith always has to accompany me as well.

Mmm. Since we’re both so overprotected, we should be able to get along well.

While I was thinking this, for the time being I raised the hem of my dress and turned towards Sophia’s brother.

“Thank you very much for accepting my invitation. My name is Katarina Claes.”

“I’m Sophia’s older brother, Nico Astarot. I’ll be much obliged to be in your care.”

The handsome boy introduced himself once again.

And, I froze upon hearing it.

Nico Ascarot..... That name sounds familiar.

“Um, this may be rude but, Nico-sama, would you happen to be the prime minister-sama’s son?”

“Yes. That’s right.”

He is!? This person, I was thinking he’s such a perfect handsome boy, it’s because he’s a capture target!



Honestly, I want to immediately go back to my room to read my "Previous life's game memories" notes..... But in the meantime, I desperately tried to remember what I could.

Nico Ascarot, the prime minister's son, Alan and Jared's childhood friend. He's one year older than the heroine, and is a taciturn senpai type of character.

Ugh, I can't remember any more than this. To begin with, I haven't even captured Nico yet. I died after finishing the Jared route. In the end, I never even got started on Nico's route. All I know about him, is what was in the game's character introductions, and little tidbits than I heard from my otaku friend A-chan that cleared the game first.

If I recall correctly, A-chan said..... the rival for Nico was..... his sister!! That's right, Nico was designed as quite a siscon, and the rival is his sister. And, to capture Nico, I think A-chan told me that you have to capture his affections before his sister does.

Ahh, thank you A-chan. I'm sorry about being mad at you at that time for the spoilers. I can't believe that A-chan's spoilers from that time would come in handy here.

If the rival for Nico is his sister, that means it's not Katarina! That means, even if I get involved with Nico, I probably won't get any destruction flags.

Anyways, if the rival for his affections is his sister, that means I won't accidentally steal anyone's lines like that time with Alan and Mary and get in the way of their affections.

Good, if it's like that then it won't be a problem even if I make friends with Sophia. She's my long-awaited comrade to chat about romance novels with. I won't let her escape so easily!

".....Uh, Katarina-sama."

It seems that I was completely lost in my own little world. Sophia was looking at me with a worried face.

“Ahh, Sophia-sama. I’m sorry. Once again, thank you very much for coming. If it’s alright with you, let’s continue from where we left off last time.”

As I said so, I invited Sophia over to a table prepared with sweets and tea.

And then, we spent our time very meaningfully. Although Sophia was nervous at visiting my place for the first time, once we started talking about books, she became quite talkative. It seems that she really loves books. Of course, she knew about all the popular romance novels right now, but she also read a lot of old legends and history books and fairy tales, and those stories were all very interesting as well. She recommended several books to me.

If I do say so myself, her brother Nico has been completely left out of everything..... Well, I don’t have the time to concern myself over such a matter, it can’t be helped. Man, he’s really such an emotionless and taciturn boy like in the settings. It seems like such a waste of a handsome boy.

Time flies when you’re having fun, before I noticed it the sun was going down, Sophia’s family servant raised her voice and said that “it’s time that we have to go now.”

And when the family servant urged Sophia to get up to leave, the sunlight hit her hair as she stood up and her hair sparkled in the sunshine. It’s so beautiful. I’m sure that it’ll be just like touching silk. Ahh~, I want to touch it even just a little bit.

“You really do have such beautiful hair. May I touch it just a little?”

I spoke my thoughts and tried requesting Sophia.

Somehow, since I was using lines similar to the ones in “The Emerald Princess and Sophia,” my mood was completely like the Emerald

Princess. However, if it was like the story, Sophia should be blushing now, but.....

“.....Eh!?”

Unfortunately, she had such a dubious look on her face! I've done it now! I realized my grave blunder upon seeing her face. Since Mary happily allowed me to touch her fluffy hair as much as I wanted, I might have forgotten that it could very well be considered rude in this world to ask to touch a lady's hair like this.

In the first place, I almost forced her during our first meeting as I was breathing roughly..... They might think I'm a pervert..... This is bad! I can't do anything about my villainous face, but I don't want to be called a pervert!

“...Uh, uh, this is...”

Nothing came to mind as I tried to think of an excuse while panicking.

“Disgusting.....?”

“.....Eh?”

Sophia muttered something in a weak voice. I asked her to repeat herself –

“.....It's not disgusting?”

This time Sophia said it in a louder voice than earlier. Disgusting..... Me!? Since I'm a pervert, I'm disgusting!? Oh no, I'm definitely not a pervert! Even though last year a certain self-important prince accused me out of nowhere of seducing Mary..... I'm not interested in that! I'm quite straight!

“Uh, that's..... I'm...”

I opened my mouth and tried to defend myself somehow –

“Katarina-sama isn't disgusted by the way I look?”

I lost my words at hearing what she had to say next. Eh? What's this mean, that I'm not the disgusting one? Sophia is? I had a completely blank face by reflex while Sophia looked like she was about to cry.

".....Hair like an old person's and eyes as red as blood..... Everyone says I'm disgusting and a cursed child....."

"!?"

What's this!? Something this beautiful is considered disgusting!?

The people of this world have golden, silver, brown, red, and black eye and hair colors, a colorful assortment. So, I thought Sophia's white hair and red eyes would also be common. Yet..... It seems to be something different from the rest..... Anyways –

"Saying you're cursed... What on earth?"

While I was trying to question Sophia, as if to block me Nico spoke up in a cold voice.

"It's just slander..... It's merely abusive rumors spread by those jealous of father's achievements."

Indeed, the Ascarot family is very talented. Such talent probably leads to much jealousy, and many bad things must be said about them.

As for our Claes family, although Keith is extremely talented, as for the actual daughter of the family I'm referred to by some as "the weird girl over there" for some reason with no basis whatsoever.

".....Even so, it doesn't change the fact that the way I am is disgusting."

Sophia muttered without any strength in her words..... It's probably because she's been told such a thing over and over again.

Well, for sure, I've never seen anyone like Sophia before, but –

“But, I think you’re pretty though.....”

“.....Eh.”

Sophia opened her eyes wide at what I said. Sophia kept staring at me as I continued.

“I think, that Sophia-sama’s silken white hair, and eyes that sparkle like rubies are very beautiful in my opinion.”

If I don’t say something to this extent I probably won’t be able to shake off the impression of being a pervert. I must absolutely avoid being made out to be a pervert! I smiled at Sophia, trying to convey that I was straight and that she had nothing to be worried about.

“As such, I’ll be very happy if you could continue coming over to play with me. And if it’s alright with you, won’t you be friends with me?”

As I said so, I extended my hands and gripped Sophia’s hands tightly. Those beautiful white hands of hers clenched mine tightly as well. Happily, this time she no longer had such a dubious expression.

Thus, the friend that I had always wanted to discuss romance novels with, get!

After I sent off Sophia and Nico in their horse-drawn carriage. When I returned to my room, and pulled out my “Previous life’s game memories” notes –

I didn’t have anything written there aside from what I remembered today.

Well, I’m a little surprised that Sophia turned out to be a capture target’s sister, a rival character just like Katarina, but –

This time I have peace of mind because I probably won’t get in the way of their relationship.

And, it's very good news that Sophia is the same age as me, and also has magic power. That means that she'll be my classmate in magic school.

I'll always be able to discuss books with her from now on! I was jumping up and down in joy on top of my bed, and ended up being warned to be cautious by Anne.

After that, Sophia began coming to my house regularly. By the way, Nico would always accompany her.

The best part was that Mary finally got influenced by our passionate discussions and asked if she could borrow some books, so Mary began reading with us and our book discussions became even livelier.

Also, for Sophia who had almost never played outside before, she began helping me in the field as well.

At first, Sophia and Nico were rather shocked, but now it's okay to appear in front of them in my work clothes.

In this way, I increased the number of repeat visitors to my place.

## **17 - Reading books by myself in a gilded cage**

My name is Sophia Ascarot. I was born as Earl Ascarot's eldest daughter. My gentle and reliable father is the prime minister of our country, and is greatly trusted by the king. I also had a very kind and beautiful mother and older brother.

I was born into a wealthy and respectable house, and am blessed with a wonderful family. Ever since I was born, I was given a lot of happiness from my family.

Because of this though..... There was a price to be paid for my blessings.....

I wasn't born the same as everyone else.

My hair was completely devoid of any color and was pure white, and my eyes were the color of blood.

My appearance was different from everyone.

Whenever I went outside, I would be looked at strangely, and people would call me the "cursed child" behind my back.

Even so, my family loved me very much. My father would always stroke my head gently, mother would always hug me, and my brother always stayed close to protect me.

My kind family says that one day someone who accepts me for who I am will appear..... That I will definitely be able to make a wonderful friend..... I don't think such a person is going to appear.

And so, I mostly shut myself in my room. This way, I won't catch people's attention.....

And I would always be reading books inside my room. All the wonderful stories helped me forget about my painful reality.

I opened my favorite book, a story about the friendship between a princess and a commoner girl. "The Emerald Princess and Sophia." One of the main characters had the same name as me. Sophia in the story is a cheerful, popular girl with beautiful black hair and black eyes. In front of such a wonderful Sophia, the princess of the country appeared.

"You really do have such beautiful hair. May I touch it just a little?" The princess said so to Sophia while smiling. Sophia smiled back shyly.

It's a wonderful story that the cursed me will never be able to experience.

So, alone in my room, I would always imagine myself to be the main character of the story. I can only become a wonderful, popular girl in my imagination.....

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“Sophia, please join the tea party at the castle.”

One day, my father said this to me. I’ve never been to a tea party before. Whenever I go outside, everyone would look at me strangely because of my appearance, so I’d rather not go outside and experience that. That’s what I said as I refused. However, father who always listened to what I wanted would not budge his ground today.

“Listen up, Sophia. You have magic power. That means that when you turn fifteen, you’ll be required to attend magic school. You won’t be able to always hole yourself up in your room. This tea party is being hosted by the princes, and many noble children will be attending. Some of them will probably be attending magic school with you. I know it might be tough on you, and I don’t mind if you come back early, but you have to start getting used to the outside world little by little.”

Certainly, it’s mandated that I have to attend magic school once I turn fifteen. I know that I can’t always stay in my room playing make believe all the time.

I have to start getting used to things little by little – I summoned what little courage I had and decided to participate in the tea party.

And so I attended my first tea party together with my brother.

The extravagant tea party was held in a corner of the castle garden. There were more people there than I had ever seen before. At first, I



tried the mountains of sweets and teas together with my brother, but.....

As soon as I strayed a little from my brother, I was immediately surrounded by some other noble children. All of them had grim faces.

And then they brought me over to a tree by the edge of the garden.

“Hey you, don’t you know that this is a very special occasion where the princes are hosting a tea party for the first time!?”

“That’s right! If a cursed child like you comes here, it’ll spoil the atmosphere!”

“To begin with, you shouldn’t even be coming out in public when you look like that!”

All of them were badmouthing me together.

I know that I’m disgusting, and I know that it’s to be expected for them to hate me, but..... I bit my lips. As I thought, I shouldn’t have left my room. I was thinking that it would be much better if I could always live a sheltered life in my room..... While I was thinking so –

“Could you please let me pass?”

I heard a clear voice from behind me. When I looked back to see who it was, I saw a girl standing there with a dignified air about her as if she was the Emerald Princess from the story.

With one line from the girl, she easily made the people around me scatter and flee.

I don’t really understand exactly what happened..... But even so, I understood that this girl had helped me.

And while I was still confused, the girl smiled elegantly, and went off dashing. I just stared at her back all the while.

After that, I hid behind the tree for a while, and then returned to the tea party later after confirming that none of the people from earlier were around. Then, I met the girl from before again by accident.

I wanted to thank her for helping me earlier..... I summoned all the courage I had and tried to speak to the girl.

“Uh,”

When she turned around to look at me, her dignified appearance was unchanged from earlier.

“Uhh..... (Thank you for earlier...)”

I was so nervous that I couldn’t speak. Her light blue eyes were looking at me. And then she said something suddenly.

“Your hair is just like silk! I wonder if I may touch it just a little bit?”

“.....Eh!”

That’s a line from “The Emerald Princess and Sophia” which I’ve read dozens of times. The main character Sophia is a cheerful, popular girl that had a chance meeting with a mysterious girl in the outskirts of town. A girl with a dignified atmosphere – her name was –

“.....Emerald Princess!”

By reflex, I said it out loud. Then –

“The Emerald Princess romance novel!! You know the story ‘The Emerald Princess and Sophia!’”

Before I realized it, the girl before me grabbed my shoulders. I was just, completely lost. Exactly, why did this girl just say the Emerald Princess’s lines..... And why is it that right now, she’s grabbing my shoulders..... I had no idea what was going on.

Also – up to now, I’ve seen lots of strange looks or cold looks aimed at me, but.....

This girl was looking at me with sparkling eyes for some reason. I got even more confused at seeing her eyes.

And so, I was overwhelmed by her momentum, and without knowing anything that was going on, just continued to nod in response to her questions.....

“What are you doing, nee-san?”

I heard a questioning voice from beside her. When I looked towards the source of the voice, I saw a handsome boy with flaxen hair and blue eyes standing there. It seems that this boy and girl must know each other.

“Ah, I’m really sorry.”

Upon being confronted by the boy, the girl released my shoulders. And then she gracefully grasped the hems of her dress and curtsied.

“I apologize for my earlier rudeness. I am Katarina Claes. I’ll be much obliged to be in your care.”

I was fascinated by her gestures that really seemed to be like the princess from the story. And so before I realized it I was hurriedly introducing myself in return.

“.....I’m Sophia Ascarot.”

And then, after that, something unbelievable happened.

“Sophia-sama! If it’s alright with you, would you like to chat with me for a bit?”

This Katarina girl was holding my hands as she said so.

What on earth is this girl talking about..... I wondered if she was joking with me.

I was just too stunned to understand the situation. And then –

“Well then, Sophia-sama. Next time, won’t you please come over to play with me at my place?”

“.....Ah, okay.”

Before noticing it... I promised to visit Katarina’s place. While making the promise, I kept trying to decide if this was reality, or if perhaps this was just one of my usual dreams from my overactive imagination.

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And so, the promised day finally arrived.

Since I never go out by myself, my kind brother came along with me. My older brother by one year with beautiful black hair and black eyes would always defend me and gently hug me. Today, his presence beside me also gave off a very reliable feeling.

And so I gathered up all my courage and visited the Claes mansion, and the servants that came out to greet us had rather shocked expressions. I was already accustomed to this, but.....

The courage that I had summoned was gradually losing its strength. Maybe, I’ll only be teased..... While I was waiting anxiously in the guest room, she appeared.

Katarina was breathing hard, and it seemed as if she had hurried to meet us, she just stared at us for a while without saying anything.

I wondered again if she invited me only because she wanted to tease me. Maybe it was a mistake to have come over and visited. While I was

frozen stiff not knowing what to say, my reliable brother greeted Katarina first.

“Thank you very much for inviting my sister. Since my sister almost never goes out by herself, I am accompanying her today. I’m her older brother, Nico.”

At hearing my brother’s words Katarina finally responded.

“Thank you very much for accepting my invitation. My name is Katarina Claes.”

Thank you very much for accepting..... Maybe it wasn’t a joke at my expense after all..... I wonder if I’ll end up being glad to have come here.

“I’m Sophia’s older brother, Nico Astarot. I’ll be much obliged to be in your care.”

My brother introduced himself to Katarina again. Then, she froze up. I wonder why.....

I was worried about the completely frozen Katarina and said something.

“.....Uh, Katarina-sama.”

“Ahh, Sophia-sama. I’m sorry. Once again, thank you very much for coming. If it’s alright with you, let’s continue from where we left off last time.”

While she said so, Katarina urged me over to a table prepared with sweets and tea.

Although I started off very anxious, after actually talking with Katarina for some time, those feelings vanished. Being able to chat with someone about the books I loved for the first time like this, was like a dream come true.

Then, the dream was over too quick and time was up, the sun was setting before I even noticed, and my family servant raised her voice and said that “it’s time that we have to go now.”

And then when I stood up to leave, I heard Katarina’s voice imploring me.

“You really do have such beautiful hair. May I touch it just a little?”

“.....Eh!?”

My face became stiff by reflex. What on earth exactly is Katarina saying..... There’s no way that this disgusting white hair can be considered beautiful.....

Before I realized it, I asked the question that had been bothering me all this time since I met Katarina.

“Katarina-sama isn’t disgusted by the way I look?”

Whenever I go out, people would look at me strangely, and would whisper that I’m disgusting.

“.....Hair like an old person’s and eyes as red as blood..... Everyone says I’m disgusting and a cursed child.....”

There’s nothing beautiful about me at all. I’m just, only a disgusting existence.....

“Saying you’re cursed... What on earth?”

Katarina was muttering to herself while seemingly shocked.

“It’s just slander..... It’s merely abusive rumors spread by those jealous of father’s achievements.”

My brother’s voice sounded very cold. My gentle family is always covering for me like this.....

“.....Even so, it doesn’t change the fact that the way I am is disgusting.”

I always received a lot of verbal abuse for my albino appearance. It's always been like this. Why did I have to be born like this..... I want to have been born as pretty as Sophia from the story.

"But, I think you're pretty though....."

Katarina mumbled something. Pretty? What on earth are you talking about? I just stared at Katarina.

"I think, that Sophia-sama's silken white hair, and eyes that sparkle like rubies are very beautiful in my opinion."

Katarina was smiling at me as she said so.

Silken white hair, and eyes that sparkle like rubies. I wonder if she's really talking about me..... It's so hard to believe, but..... Katarina's light blue eyes didn't seem like they were lying.

She's the person that helped me during the tea party just like an ally of justice. She's a girl like the Emerald Princess from the story.

"As such, I'll be very happy if you could continue coming over to play with me. And if it's alright with you, won't you be friends with me?"

Katarina held my hands tightly.

"One day, a wonderful friend who understands Sophia will definitely appear." I never really believed those words that my family told me. After all, such a person shouldn't exist.....

Such a person, even though I thought they wouldn't exist –

Everyone looks at me with such strange looks – for someone to say that I'm beautiful, and even to want to be friends with me –

My hands were trembling in Katarina's hands. She gripped my hands tightly, and was smiling so happily.

Is this all just a dream..... While I was still being confused in the horse-drawn carriage on the way back, my brother showed off a big smile that I hardly ever see.

“I’m glad that you made a friend.”

Friend..... I always thought such a thing was impossible. That’s why I always spent my time alone in my room with my imagination.

But, in truth I really, really wanted a friend. I’ve always, always been wanting one.

I remembered how warm Katarina’s hands were, and her happy smile.

I had always wanted a friend, and had finally obtained one after having given up on it already.

And then, after that, while visiting the Claes mansion, I made friends with the twin princes, Katarina’s brother Keith, and Katarina’s friend Mary.

I had always been alone in my room, but my world suddenly became much wider.

Katarina’s friend Mary said this to me.

“Not long ago, I was always filled with self-loathing..... I hated this brown hair and these brown eyes of mine.”

I was very surprised. She was just like Katarina, a very respectable lady, I can’t see any reason why Mary would hate herself..... And I couldn’t believe that she would hate such beautiful hair and eyes.....

“But, after Katarina-sama told me over and over that she thinks I’m wonderful, that she likes me, that I’m really cute..... Now I don’t hate



myself anymore. I've also come to like this hair and these eyes of mine. That's why, Sophia will surely be fine as well."

Mary said so while looking at me.

Nobody that gathers here in this mansion, including Mary, thinks I'm disgusting.

And, Katarina is always saying, that my hair and eyes are beautiful, and wonderful. Even though everyone always thought I looked disgusting..... Katarina was praising me from the bottom of her heart.

One day, I'll be able to love myself just like Mary does..... I wonder if one day this albino appearance of mine will become accepted.....

I don't know what will come in the future. But, now I'm able to believe that such a day might even come.

"Thank you very much."

I said thank you to Mary. Then, she smiled as if to challenge me.

"But, I definitely won't hand Katarina-sama over to you~"

I had always thought it would be best for me to read books by myself in my gilded cage..... But, I was able to fly out into the world and discover so much more than that.

## **18 - I went over to play at the earl's house**

Summer was just about over, and fall was approaching. It's been several weeks since the first time that Sophia and her brother Nico visited me.

Sophia was now always coming over, and Mary would always join in as well, my romance novel boom was overheating even further. Due to

Sophia who enjoys a wide variety of books, I've also greatly increased the genres that I read.

By the way, the current boom is a book about the romance between a girl and a devilishly charming earl.

The handsome earl's devilish charm not only attracted women, even men fell for him. It's a romance story about an ordinary girl that he met in town.

At Sophia's recommendation, I started reading this story – it was about a beautiful handsome young earl who had black hair and black eyes.

Sophia told me secretly that “actually, I like it because the main character's a bit like onii-sama.”

Sophia also said to me shyly “I see him in a favorable light.....”

When I read the novel, I felt that they were indeed quite similar.

I'm already used to seeing handsome boys like Jared and Keith, but Sophia's brother Nico has his own unique atmosphere about him as well.

His face is as beautiful as a well-made doll, and his beautiful black eyes have a mysterious charm to them that draws people in.

If he grows up like this, I can certainly feel that not only women, but men as well might get attracted to him like the earl from the novel.

However, I still don't know Sophia's brother Nico very well yet.

In the game manual's information section on all the capture targets, it was said that he is the most normal person with a lot of common sense. Also, since he's my important friend's brother, I want to get along well with him, but..... The thing is, he hardly ever spoke. He only spoke when it was absolutely necessary, and even then he would only say one or two words.

Since it was always so busy around me, I hardly ever got any chances to speak to the taciturn Nico.....

However, even so I understood that he cherished Sophia very much, and he considered our feelings very much, he really is such a good onii-san. I also know very well that Sophia likes her onii-san very much.

Also, I've heard that just like Jared and Alan, he seems to be a very high spec character who's excellent in academics and swordsmanship.

If I get a chance, I definitely want to talk to him some more and deepen our friendship.....

As I was thinking so, the chance presented itself.

"If you would like, won't you come to visit me?"

I kept telling Sophia that "I want to see it, I want to see it!" about her book collection, and after telling her many times, she finally invited me over to her place. Well, it feels like I was being a little pushy and forced her into it though.....

"Is that really alright!?"

I was so happy that I was jumping in joy in celebration while grinning at Sophia, while beside me Anne was furrowing her eyebrows and saying "if your mother sees this, you'll get scolded again."

And so, I'll be going over to visit the Ascarot family.

The main purpose was to chat with Sophia about novels, but just maybe, I'll get to talk with Nico some more too.

In order to get along even better with my cute friend that loves her older brother so much, I made up my mind to speak more than two words to Nico this time.

And so, the promised day arrived, and I headed towards the Ascarot mansion with my heart all aflutter in excitement at the thought of Sophia's book collection.

By the way, as I'm the sheltered daughter of the Claes family, Keith was also accompanying me. My mother also said "be very careful not to make any social blunders" and was very worried about me. Even though I've already been to so many tea parties, and I've been to our relatives' house and Mary's house so many times without any problems, mother seems to be really worried for some reason.

And so, even though the Ascarot mansion that we visited wasn't as large as the Claes mansion, it was still a clean mansion that gave off a good feeling.

As the servants greeted us and served us tea in the guest room, suddenly a handsome man about father's age and another beautiful lady as well appeared close together.

Of course, I thought it would be Sophia coming to greet us so I just sat there with my mouth wide agape at their appearance. Uhh, who on earth could these beautiful people possibly be.

As I was thinking so, the handsome man flashed a dazzling smile towards me.

"Pleased to meet you, I'm Nico and Sophia's father, my name is Dan Ascarot. This is my wife Radea."

"My name is Radea Ascarot."

At the man's prompting, the woman smiled and greeted us as well.

What's this! They were Sophia and Nico's parents!? No wonder they were so beautiful. That means that this man is the rumored Earl Ascarot who accepted the position of prime minister from the king.

I stared at the smiling Ascarot couple. Earl Ascarot had the same black hair and black eyes as Nico, while Countess Ascarot had pale golden hair and blue eyes, and both of them seemed so beautiful as if they had come straight out of a story book. They are indeed the beautiful siblings' parents.

While I was staring at them in a daze, Keith pulled on my arm lightly. "Nee-san, greet them," Keith whispered to me in a low voice.

Oh right! As a noble daughter, I have to greet them properly –

".....Pleased to meet you, my name is Katarina Claes. Thank you very much for inviting me today."

"I'm her younger brother, my name is Keith Claes. I'll be in your care."

I greeted them gracefully as befitting a noble daughter, and following me Keith greeted them courteously as well. Yup. We greeted them properly.

Anyways..... I wonder why Sophia's parents came out instead of Sophia. My question showed on my face.

"We figured we'd come to greet you first, since our daughter won't come when we call. Right now, she's waiting for you nervously in her room."

Earl Ascarot answered my question for me.

"Oh, is that so."

For the time being, at least I understand why they showed up first now..... I was a bit nervous because her parents showed up to greet me so formally.

I've been to Mary's place many times to play, but since her father's always busy with work and is hardly ever home, I haven't even seen him since the first tea party there. That's why this is the first time my friend's parents have greeted me so formally. While I was completely stiff from the tension, Countess Ascarot walked over gracefully to me.

"I've heard many things from my daughter about you, Katarina-sama. After meeting you, my daughter seems to be having lots of fun now..... Thank you very much."

As she said so, Countess Ascarot reached out to take my hands. Looking at her so closely, she's really beautiful. Also, her features were very similar to Sophia. Although I was still very tense, I let her take my hands.

"The pleasure is mine. Being able to talk with Sophia-sama is very fun, and I'm very glad that we get along."

Because of Sophia, I've been having a very fulfilling life filled with romance novels. If I hadn't met Sophia, I wouldn't be leading this fulfilling life right now. I definitely want us to keep getting along from now on.

As I said so, Countess Ascarot that seemed so much like Sophia was gripping my hands tightly.

"I'm really glad that Sophia was able to make a wonderful friend like you!"

Then, following his wife, Earl Ascarot was also bowing his head towards me.

"I would also like to give my thanks to you. Lady Katarina Claes, thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"Ah, uh, I would like to as well, yes."

The overly beautiful couple lowered their heads together towards me, and I became rather flustered out of nervousness. I had just thought that I could do the greeting properly, and now it's all come to naught.

However, even though I was completely panicking, the Ascarot couple were still smiling at me in a friendly manner. How wonderful and kind these parents are.

And so, both of them kept gently smiling, and said “we’ll leave the rest to you girls” and they left the guest room. Even looking at them from behind, they’re so beautiful.

After the two of them left, I finally let go of my breath. ....I was really so nervous.

Well..... For the time being, I’m glad they’re so welcoming.

I think that it’s the fault of my villainous face, it’s really hard to leave a good impression on people as opposed to if I had an ordinary face.

Even when I smile elegantly, it’s highly likely to turn into the sarcastic smile of a villain. Just like that time at the castle’s tea party, it’s only sad memories of people running from me.

While staring at the door that the Ascarot couple had left from, I started whispering secretly to Keith next to me.

“They’re very beautiful, kind parents.”

“Yes, I agree.”

Keith smiled as well and agreed with me.

“As for our mother, I wish she could just be a little calmer like Countess Ascarot, she’s always angry with furrowed brows, that won’t be good for her beauty.”

“.....Nee-san. ....Mother herself probably wants to live a calmer life as well.”

When comparing the gentle and beautiful Countess Ascarot to mother, I remembered how mother always loves to complain, but Keith sent me a

pained glance for some reason. I didn't understand why, so I just looked at him blankly.

When Keith sighed at my state, Sophia appeared. Nico was accompanying her as usual.

Sophia seems to have hurried here as she was breathing hard, and her cheeks were also stained slightly red. However, even though they should have come here at the same speed, Nico's breathing was perfectly even.

"Katarina-sama, thank you very much for coming, and welcome."

The way her cheeks were slightly red as she smiled, ohh Sophia is so cute today~.

And so, I had a fun time chatting with Sophia, and I was also shown the amazing collection of books in the Ascarot mansion. There were tons and tons of the books that Sophia had read before there, I was very excited.

By the way, since Keith came with me today, Nico wasn't left out of the loop like usual. As expected of two boys that are the same age, they seemed to have various things to talk about, even for a guy as taciturn as Nico was, but not as much as Sophia and I did, their conversation was moderate in comparison to our lively and energetic discussion.

And so, the fun times were over way too quickly. Even though academic lectures always feel so much longer, and I would always wish that time would move faster...

Although I still regret having to leave, I can't bother them and stay too late, or else mother will be really angry at me. I borrowed an armful of books from Sophia, and got ready to return home.

And so, it was time to say goodbye to the Ascarot siblings at the entrance.



“Oh no, how could I! I left a book in the study that I was going to recommend to you earlier!”

Sophia raised her voice in panic.

“Ahh, is that the book you mentioned before?”

If I recall correctly, it was the book that Sophia had recommended the most to me. While passionately telling me about its appeal in the study, the book seems to have been placed there and forgotten.

“That’s right. I’m sorry. I’ll go get it for you right now!”

“Sophia, it’s okay if I just come and get it next time, you know.”

Since Sophia looked like she was about to run out of the room to the study, I said so in order to prevent her from going, but.....

“No, because it’s really such a great book, I’d love for you to read it as soon as possible. Please wait a little bit, okay?”

As she said so, Sophia went off to the study. Well, since she’s conscious of her status as a noble daughter, it’s not good to be seen running in a dress, but she was hurrying as fast as she could without running.

I saw my friend from the previous world, A-chan, in Sophia.

Just like with Sophia, in the previous world I would read manga together with her, watch anime together, and even play otome games together with A-chan.

Ahh, I’ve really made such a wonderful friend. While I was absorbed in staring at Sophia’s back as she was leaving, Nico who had been silent up until now opened his mouth.

“Katarina Claes-sama. Let me thank you once again about my sister. Really, thank you very much.”

Come to think of it, I was supposed to try and talk some more with Nico today.....

In the end, I was too excited about visiting the Ascarot family library, and was having so much fun chatting with Sophia about books that I had completely forgotten about it.

This is a chance to talk to him a little and become better friends!

“No, I should be saying thanks. Thank you very much for getting along well with me..... Please tell that to your parents as well.”

“.....Parents, eh.”

Come to think of it, ever since they greeted us, Nico’s parents hadn’t come to say anything to us at all.

“Yes, they even came out specially in order to greet me. They’re really wonderful parents.”

“.....Is that so, thank you very much.”

Nico returned to his regular expressionless self and didn’t say anything further.

Even so, that’s the longest interaction I’ve had with him up to now, but..... It’s still very far from a level where it can be said that he’s talked a lot.

I wonder what on earth Nico was talking to Keith about. As the older sister, I really want to know too! If I was a boy, I wonder if he would have more things to say to me. ....Let’s find a topic of conversation..... I got it!

Since it’s like this, I might as well use my knowledge from my previous life! I’ll show you the power of seventeen years of my memories from a previous world! I won’t lose to my stepbrother!

Topic of conversation..... Something to talk about..... I desperately tried to remember anything. And then – I remembered the way that the lady from next door caught my father for thirty minutes straight without letting him go. This is it!!

Anyways, since she's an expert in lengthy conversations, if I use the lady from next door's lines I'll surely be able to have a nice long conversation with Nico. That's right, I'll start off with those words that she always used –

"Your parents are so wonderful, and your sister is so cute as well, Nico-sama, you're a really lucky person."

Copying that lady, I smiled as widely as I could.

By the way, this is what that lady always told my father, "you're really such a lucky person to have married such a wonderful wife," and I just changed it around a little. When she started her talk with those lines, in the end my father wasn't able to leave for a full thirty minutes. Yup. I've imitated everything perfectly. However.....

".....Lucky person....."

For some reason, the atmosphere around Nico seems to have changed.

"Yeah, er....."

".....You think I'm a lucky person?"

His face was just as expressionless as always, but something seems different. I'm a little lost at why Nico seems to be different. Ahh, drats. I must have failed in my choice of lines to use.....

"You have such a wonderful family..... Isn't that so?"

I mumbled rather timidly, and then..... Nico opened his black eyes wide and kept staring straight at me. Then –

".....That's right. I have great parents I can respect, and I'm very lucky to have such a gentle, lovely sister."

As he said so Nico seemed to be very happy..... And then he started laughing.

I've known him for several weeks now, but I've never seen his smiling face before.

I had also heard from Sophia that her brother doesn't laugh very often. Such a Nico was now laughing. And so happily to boot –

I had always thought that he was quite handsome, but when he's smiling, he seems to be several times even more handsome.

Right now, he's just like the charming earl from the story whose captivating smile alone can capture everyone's hearts.

Wow, to think Nico was really such a charming earl.....

And so, what solved the issue of me freezing up at the major incident happening in front of me was Sophia returning with the book in hand.

"Katarina-sama, it's this book."

When I snapped out of being frozen, I saw the lovely Sophia next to me holding out a book, and..... My cute stepbrother Keith was also in a daze, he just kept staring at Nico who had already returned to his usual expressionless self.

This is really bad! I've lost my cute stepbrother to the charming earl! I didn't want him to fall in love with the heroine, but, it's pretty dangerous to lose him to a guy as well!

At this rate, my all-important stepbrother might step off the proper path!

I took the book from Sophia while casually guarding Keith from Nico, and departed from the Ascarot mansion.

And so, during the trip back in the horse-drawn carriage.....

“.....I can't believe it, Nico is really just like that charming earl, from now on, I absolutely have to defend Keith from his grasp.....”

“.....No way, to have my rivals be increasing yet again, exactly how many more does she have to have before she's satisfied.....”

Keith and I each had our own troubles as we looked out the window while grumbling to ourselves.

## **19 – Meeting a strange girl**

I'm the eldest son of Earl Ascarot, Nico Ascarot.

Since my father is this country's prime minister, I've had many chances to go with my father to the castle since I was little. Because of that, I've had the opportunity to interact with the princes of this country.

In particular, I got along really well with the twin princes that were one year younger than me.

My childhood friends, the twin princes, began changing about one year ago.

The third prince Jared would always have a perfect fake smile plastered to his face. He would always say “boring” and it was as if his eyes reflected nothing.

However, one time, Jared said “I discovered something very interesting” and laughed. His smile seemed to be somewhat different from his fake smile up to now.

And then as time passed, Jared began changing rapidly. His fake smiles decreased, and his smiles became bright and lively.

And, as for Jared's younger brother, the fourth prince Alan. Alan was always being compared to Jared, and so he had strong feelings against Jared. The desperate way he looked always seemed rather pained to me.

Such an Alan also began changing from a certain point in time. It was as if a heavy burden had been removed from him, he stopped competing against Jared. What's more, saying he liked the subject, he began to focus more on music. His talent was amazing, and it's even being said that he's been blessed by the god of music.

However, the biggest change of all was that Alan was now interacting with Jared normally when he used to avoid him so much. Everyone in the castle was surprised at this. After all, Alan had always treated Jared as a rival in an extreme manner.

What's more, not only did they start interacting normally, they even began doing things together again. Recently, they've even been seen chatting happily together in the castle.

It was really such a dramatic change. However, most people did not know the reason why the twins would have changed so much.

And then, since an unknown time, there was a rumor abound –

The reason the twins have changed so much, and why they're together so frequently now..... Has something to do with the Claes family.

There's something, or someone, there that caused the two of them to change so much –

A few days after the tea party at the castle, I myself visited the Claes mansion from the rumors.

While my sister and I were at the tea party, my sister was invited by the daughter of the Claes family, Katarina Claes, to go visit her at the Claes mansion.

My younger sister, Sophia Ascarot, is a very gentle, cute, and splendid lady.

However, her hair and skin are pure white, and her eyes are red, Sophia looked a little different from other people.

It was a very cruel world for my sister just because she looked a little different from everyone else.

If she goes out, people will look at her strangely, and people that envy our family will keep gossiping and telling people that she's a "cursed child." Also, it's the really foolish children that say the cruelest things of all.

And, always being glared at heartlessly, always being talked about heartlessly.....

Eventually, Sophia shut herself up in her room and would no longer go out.

By now, Sophia hasn't went out for several years. It's been decided that she'll participate in the tea party being hosted by my childhood friends, the twin princes.

Sophia was considerably reluctant, and even I didn't really want to go if I didn't have to. The princes are somewhat acquainted with Sophia, so they definitely won't be looking at her strangely or anything. However, since this tea party is the first one that the princes are hosting, it's a very large scale affair. There'll be a ton of noble children there. There will definitely be people there that look down on and make fun of Sophia.

I insisted on not going to such a place, but was persuaded by father.

"Both you and Sophia have magic power. When you turn fifteen, both of you will be required to attend magic school. Also, you're a different

grade and gender from Sophia. You can't always stay by her side and protect her. Sophia has to learn how to protect herself on her own. And since there's going to be so many children there, Sophia might even find herself a friend.

Both of us have magic power, and it's mandated by law that a person has to attend magic school once they turn fifteen.

I'll be enrolling in school after four more years. And then Sophia will have to enroll in school one year after me.

I always want to stay next to my important sister and protect her. However, I know that it's not possible to always stay next to her and protect her because our grade and gender are different.

Before Sophia started shutting herself in her room, our parents had wanted her to go out and to be able to make some friends, but..... Children are sensitive about those different from themselves. Most of the time, it just ended in Sophia being hurt.

I also understand very well that just staying like this isn't good either. However, I don't want Sophia to get hurt and cry any more..... I'm very scared of that happening again.

At the tea party that Sophia and I attended together, of all things that could have happened Sophia got separated from me. Even though I was thinking how important it was for me to protect Sophia, I'm so ashamed of myself.

There were several noble children at this tea party that had verbally abused Sophia before. While I'm separated from Sophia, I'm worried that they'll do something to Sophia again.

And then even though I desperately searched for Sophia I couldn't find her anywhere, when I finally ended up finding her the tea party was already over. And so, when I found Sophia, she seemed to be stunned



for some reason. When I asked her why since I was worried that someone may have done something to her –

“I was invited to visit a person by the name of Katarina Claes-sama.”

Sophia mumbled this while stunned.

And so, I visited the Claes mansion from the rumors.

But honestly, I wasn't all that interested in it. That's because, we've received such invitations before, and they all turned out to be in order to make fun of and look down upon Sophia.

Since I couldn't help worrying, I asked my childhood friend Jared, who also happens to be Katarina's fiance, about Katarina. He was close by greeting guests when Katarina invited my sister, so I asked him what happened.

“I thought that recently she seemed to be quite well behaved, but to see that she's hooked yet another girl.....”

“.....?”

For some reason, Jared was talking to himself in a small voice, then he smiled profoundly.

“Nico. Although Katarina is really strange, she definitely won't hurt your all-important imouto-san.”

Since Jared said so, I decided to believe him, and accompanied my sister to the Claes mansion.

“I think, that Sophia-sama's silken white hair, and eyes that sparkle like rubies are very beautiful in my opinion.”

Katarina Claes smiled at Sophia as she said so.

“As such, I’ll be very happy if you could continue coming over to play with me. And if it’s alright with you, won’t you be friends with me?”

She was smiling kindly while holding Sophia’s hands.

It was just as Jared said. This girl would never hurt my precious sister.

And so, I noticed it while looking at Katarina smile towards my sister. It was definitely this girl that changed Jared and Alan.

A strange girl with a unique atmosphere. The princes are probably visiting this mansion so often in order to meet with this girl.

And so, after meeting Katarina, Sophia changed as well. She escaped from the cage of her room, and began actively going out on her own. Her formerly gloomy face became lively and bright, and smiles returned to her expressions.

I’m deeply indebted to Katarina Claes.

★★★★★★★★★★

When Sophia began to venture out more often instead of staying inside her gilded cage, vicious slandering by gossipmongers increased as well. However, now that my sister had finally recovered her smile, there was no more returning to her dark room for her. I did my best to silence those that spoke ill of Sophia. I decided that the way I did things before wasn’t sufficient, so I silenced them as thoroughly as possible this time.

And so, those second-rate worthless fellows decreased gradually.....

“I feel very sorry for Nico-sama who’s burdened by working so hard for the sake of his imouto-sama.”

“Even though Nico-sama is so outstanding, it’s pitiful that there’s so much being said about the siblings.”

“The Ascarot family is so unfortunate to have so many bad things being said about their daughter.”

People were no longer looking down on us as much, it was more purely pity and sympathy now. Since I had desperately worked so hard for Sophia’s sake on this matter, those voices increased.

There was no malice present in those voices. But, unfortunately, it was nothing but pity.

However..... Those words were stabbing me mercilessly in the heart.

I’m not burdened in any way. My family isn’t unfortunate at all.

I’m actually very proud of my splendid parents, and my gentle, lovely sister, and consider myself to be a very lucky person.....

It’s not that I can’t understand why they think that.

If I say I’m very fortunate then I’m always told “you’re amazing for being so patient and working so hard.” It’s very frustrating to hear that.

Even though I’m so lucky..... Why does everyone arbitrarily decide on their own that I’m supposed to be unfortunate?

Don’t decide on your own that my precious sister is a burdensome existence! Even though I think that I’m extremely fortunate to have Sophia been born as my little sister.....

Before long, I had gotten very tired of hearing all these disagreeable thoughts. I thought that it would be best if I didn’t bother with hearing them anymore.

Right now, my precious sister is smiling so happily. That's enough for me.

Even if people think that it's unfortunate and pity us..... There's nothing I can do about them not understanding. I thought it was fine like this, but.....

"Your parents are so wonderful, and your sister is so cute as well, Nico-sama, you're a really lucky person."

The girl before me, Katarina Claes, was smiling as she said so. It's the same gentle smile that's been directed at Sophia before.

".....Lucky person....."

That's right, that's what I've always been thinking. However, nobody ever understood that until now.

"Yeah, er....."

".....You think I'm a lucky person?"

I stared straight at Katarina.

"You have such a wonderful family..... Isn't that so?"

Her light blue eyes were looking directly at me as well.

".....That's right. I have great parents I can respect, and I'm very lucky to have such a gentle, lovely sister."

I thought that it would be fine even if nobody understood. I'd already given up.

And yet.....

This girl..... Katarina understands.....

Ahh, in truth I always wanted for someone to understand this feeling of mine.

I felt as if all the frustration I'd ever felt in my heart was subsiding.

I looked over the girl in front of me once more. The duke's daughter, Katarina Claes. The strange girl that managed to completely change the twin princes and my sister.

When nobody ever understood what I was thinking, she's the first to ever understand.

Why the princes and my sister would visit Katarina's place almost every day, I finally understand the reason now.

And so, I'm sure that I'll be joining them in going over to her place frequently from now on.

Not in order to accompany my sister, but in order to see Katarina.

## **20 – I celebrated my birthday**

The days passed by really fast, and ever since I recalled my memories during spring when I was eight years old, seven years have passed before I even noticed.

I'll be fifteen soon.

In this world, fifteen is the age at which noble children are required to make their social debut –

Also – it's the age at which people with magic power are required to enroll in magic school.

This summer, I'll turn fifteen, and I'll be entering magic school in spring of next year.

By the way, in magic school, no matter your social status, everyone was required to live in the dorms.

As expected, those of higher social statuses seem to get better rooms, but it's even okay to bring servants with you..... Anyways, it won't be as free of a life as I have now.

And, when I enter magic school – the otome game that I've been afraid of will begin.

The story begins when the commoner heroine enters magic school with the extremely rare ability to use light magic despite not even being a noble.

At school, the heroine will meet and be able to fall in love with various high-spec capture targets, all handsome boys, such as the twin princes, the duke's adopted son, and the prime minister's son.

And so, the villainess Katarina Claes obstructed her, walking the path of destruction.

In the seven years since I've regained my memory, I've made various efforts to avoid my destruction ends.

I've practiced swordsmanship, and trained in magic, I pulled Keith out of his room so that he wouldn't be lonely, and I had the head gardener Tom-san help me create an elaborate toy snake.

Because of all that, my sword swings have been praised, my stepbrother was no longer a shut-in, and I have a toy snake that looks perfectly like the real thing.

However, there was something that didn't go well. ....I'm talking about strengthening my magic.

My magic was originally the shabbiest magic of them all, earth magic, and the only spell I could cast was "Earth Thud" which could only move some earth two or three centimeters at first..... After training for a year,

I was able to improve it all the way to fifteen centimeters, and I had thought that I'd be able to use much grander magic soon, but.....

After that, no matter how much more I trained, I couldn't move the earth any more than that, and I couldn't even use any other magic spells.

At first, I didn't want to admit the truth, but..... In the end, I had no choice but to acknowledge it.

It's extremely unfortunate, but..... I have almost no talent in magic whatsoever.

If I attend magic school, there might be the chance that my magic will "bloom" suddenly, but..... I won't get my hopes up.....

In that case, my original strategy of finding magic-related work if I get exiled out of the country may no longer be useable.

If that happens, what am I supposed to do to support myself.....

When I was troubled over thinking things over, I heard from a servant that there were many large farms all over that hired farmers.

That's it! I'm not like before where all my plants will wilt, and I've become pretty good at working in the field now. So if I get exiled to another country, let's seek out a large farm and work as a farmer. As long as I have a job, I'll be able to make a living somehow.

While I still trained my magic, just in case I had to become a farmer I started studying agriculture as well.

In this way, my anti-destruction countermeasures will be perfect.

And while I had my perfect countermeasures all planned out, there were also unexpected occurrences in my daily life.

That would be, why all the capture targets and rivals were gathering in my house every day, and why everyone's relationships and personalities seemed to be different from the game settings.

Let's start with Jared Stuart. He's the third prince of the country, and the capture target that's my fiancée. Even though he looks like an orthodox blonde-haired, blue-eyed prince, on the inside he's actually an evil sadistic prince. If the heroine falls in love with Jared, Katarina will head straight to her destruction.

However, even though Jared in the game was supposed to be "not interested in Katarina at all, and almost never visited her....." Before I noticed, he would come over to my house once every three days.

And, he even helps me harvest the fruits and vegetables from the field, and would always bring me sweets as presents, we're completely friends now. We have a lot of contact.

Honestly, we get along pretty well..... To the point where I cannot imagine Jared cutting me down with his sword or exiling me from the country, but.....

However, if Jared meets the heroine and falls in love for the first time, as his fiancée, I'll become a hindrance..... "Love changes people" is what's written as well in the romance novels that I read. I can't let down my guard.

Also, my scar that caused Jared to get engaged to me in the first place disappeared a few years ago.

And, when I noticed this a few years ago and relievedly told Jared about it.....



“Prince Jared, the scar on my forehead has disappeared. That means that you won’t have to take responsibility for me anymore, and can cancel the engagement.”

When I happily told him this, Jared seemed a little shocked for a while..... A little bit later, his usual smile returned.

“Oh, really? Why don’t you show me.”

He approached me with that beautiful smile on his lips, and forcefully parted my bangs to the side. My wounds were supposed to have all disappeared and left my forehead clean, but.....

“On the contrary, a few scars remain.”

Jared said so as he stared at my forehead that was supposed to have become pretty again.

“Eh!? But I confirmed it in the mirror many times..... I even showed Anne.....”

I muttered in a daze.....

“Well, that’s wrong. There’s still some scars remaining. Hey, don’t you think so as well?”

Jared’s last question was directed at my maid Anne who was waiting by my side. Then, even though she had just told me “it’s pretty again and everything’s disappeared. Isn’t that great, ojou-sama?” she nodded her head vigorously and agreed with Jared..... I can’t believe it, that traitor.....

And so, even though the scars absolutely should have disappeared, they didn’t disappear for some reason, I was told by Jared firmly that “the engagement absolutely can’t be canceled” as he smiled wonderfully, ending this conversation.

After that, even though she supported my engagement to Jared at first..... Mother was against my engagement now as well, and even

Keith said directly “Katarina nee-san isn’t fit to be a prince’s bride,” trying to help me out, but even now I haven’t been able to cancel the engagement.

Indeed, Jared won’t let go of this engagement so easily because just like in the game, he wants to use this to defend against all the other noble girls that would otherwise chase after him.

Thus, I wasn’t able to cut off the destruction flag of being engaged to Jared, and it seems that I’ll have to bring my sword and the toy snake with me to school for self-protection. Also, I’ll have to practice being able to smoothly throw the toy snake from my pocket from now on.

Then, about Keith Claes. He’s the capture target that was adopted into my family seven years ago for his powerful magic, my cute stepbrother. If the heroine falls in love with Keith, Katarina will also head straight towards her destruction.

He’s a handsome boy with flaxen hair and blue eyes, and since he was neglected by his stepmother and stepsister, had a lonely upbringing and became a playboy type character because of it. And when he entered school, his loneliness was supposed to be healed by the heroine and he would fall in love, but.....

If that happens, I’ll be very troubled, so in order for him to not be lonely, I’ve been pulling him out of his room every day. During this time, without me having to pull him out anymore it turned out that we were always together. Therefore, Keith shouldn’t have grown up lonely this time. This way, the heroine won’t heal his loneliness and he shouldn’t fall in love with her.

However, there’s one thing I failed at. In order to prevent him from being a trashy playboy, I always told him that he has to “treat girls gently and kindly,” and the result..... He’s become a gentlemanly ladies’ man.

Since he obediently obeyed his sister and treated women gently and kindly just as I told him to, that's a wonderful thing. However, as the years passed and the lovely Keith matured, he's somehow become a guy that emits lots of sex appeal just like in the game.

I didn't notice this happening at all. Maybe it's because I'm with him every day, I've gotten used to it and didn't feel anything from Keith.....

And by the time I realized it, all the noble daughters, and even all the female servants were hanging on to him and the ladies' man had been completed.

And so, I was able to prevent Keith's loneliness, but..... As for preventing him from becoming a playboy..... Even with my help he's already completed this form.

Then, about Alan Stuart. He's the fourth prince of this country, and is Jared's younger twin brother as well as a capture target. He's a beautiful prince with a wild streak, with silver hair and blue eyes, and he's always being compared to Jared, so he's constantly in pain from feelings of inferiority, and it should have been set that he hates his brother, but.....

Alan didn't seem to be troubled by an inferiority complex or anything at all now, and it doesn't seem like he hates Jared either. Well, I wouldn't say that they are best friends, but their relationship seems reasonably good to me.

Moreover, since in the Alan route Katarina didn't appear as she wasn't a rival, in the game I should have had hardly any contact with Alan, but.....

For some reason Alan would come to visit me almost every day, and his talent for music has completely bloomed so I'm always receiving invitations to his piano and violin concerts, I would always go together with everyone. We're completely friends now.

In the first place, Alan shouldn't have had such a talent already for music in the game. Rather, it was set that the heroine would become aware of his talent for music, and would help it bloom, but.....

Well, things were different from the game settings in a lot of ways for some reason.

Then, about Mary Hunt. She's Alan's fiancée, and is also the rival character on his route. She's a beauty with auburn hair and doll-like eyes.

In the game settings, she didn't think highly of Katarina Claes, and just like Alan, should have had almost no contact with me, but..... She's already one of my best friends now.

In our first meeting, she was so nervous, but Mary's completely changed from her always frightened self in these seven years.

She was excellent in her studies, had such a dignified and elegant manner when she made her social debut a little while ago, and her wonderful dancing monopolized the topic of conversation during her debut. She's become exactly like the noble daughter that she was in the game.

However, in the game, Mary loved Alan from the bottom of her heart..... Mary currently doesn't seem to be deeply in love with Alan like that right now.

I think they got along normally, but, she never really had anything to say about Alan when we were together, and they hardly ever seemed to meet each other.

Or could it be, they're just hiding things from me out of embarrassment?

Moreover, in the game, Mary should have become a splendid lady in order to become a lady befitting a prince's bride, but.....

It seems that Mary doesn't actually care too much about being a prince's wife. Several years ago, Mary complained to me that she's "not fit to be someone important like a prince's wife." Then, she would always tell me how hard it is to be a part of the royal family and act befitting of a prince's wife.

During these conversations, when she heard that I didn't like being engaged to Prince Jared, she became even more melancholy. I mean, if even the perfect Mary thinks such a role is too hard, it's even less fitting for me.

And so, to assuage my anxieties, Mary would tell me gently "let's run away together to another country and break off our engagements." She's really such a kind and reliable friend.

Then, about Nico Ascarot. He's the taciturn, expressionless son of the prime minister, and also a capture target. With black hair and eyes, and a perfect doll-like face, he's a handsome boy with a devilish charm that can even capture men as well as women with his unique atmosphere.

Just like the others, in the game settings Nico wasn't supposed to have any contact with Katarina Claes at all, but..... After I became friends with his sister by chance, he also started coming over to my house almost every day.

He was taciturn and expressionless like usual, and only spoke up when he had to, but..... His devilish charm seems to be increasing in strength every year.

Nico did laugh at more things than he did before, it's probably because he's opening up to us, I think I should be happy, but..... I can't, that smile's a trap.

What's more, it's rumored that Nico is very popular with women and men alike. Everyone will be seduced by him once he smiles at them. The damage has already spread to the Claes mansion, several maids have already fallen victim to him and lost themselves to him completely.

Even so, for the time being I'll do my best to defend Keith and Mary from his devilish charm and save them from such a fate.

Then, about Sophia Ascarot. She's both Nico's sister, and the rival for the Nico route. She's a beauty just like her brother, and shouldn't have had any contact with Katarina either, but..... She's now my romance novel comrade, and one of my best friends just like Mary.

She shut herself in her room until she was almost ten, reading a great amount of books, so her book recommendations have never missed their marks. She also has great talent in discovering wonderful new works, I even called Sophia my teacher out of reverence.

Sophia always loved Nico from the bottom of her heart, she would often speak of her onii-chan so fondly saying "onii-sama is so wonderful. I'd recommend him as a husband."

If a person that Nico likes happens to appear, she might just start sulking. I'll have to comfort my precious friend at that time if it happens!

And so, without understanding why all the capture targets and rivals had somehow become friends with me, we'll all be attending school together next spring.

★★★★★★★★★★

My fifteenth birthday has finally arrived. This party has been planned ever since several years ago as my social debut, and it was held at my house.

By the way, this party will be a dance party. I'll have to greet all the guests, and will even have to dance.

Even though I was supposed to be very good at athletics, unfortunately I didn't have much of a sense of rhythm, I'm not very good at dancing.

Even so, I trained under mother's supervision for this birthday party, I had painful dance lessons over and over, it seems that I've become adequate enough, but..... There's still some worry that I might mess up somewhere.

What's more, during this dance party, it's been decided that my escort will be Prince Jared for some reason. I had really wanted it to be Keith, but I was told that it can't be anyone but Jared because he's my official fiance.

If it's Keith, even if I step on his foot, he'll just laugh it off and forgive me, but..... I felt like Jared wouldn't be the same way.

When I thought so, it only added to my depressed feelings towards this party.

Since the party was scheduled in the evening, I had to apply makeup starting from morning, and had to make sure that my clothes were absolutely perfect, I was already exhausted well before the party in the evening.

However, after everyone put in their efforts a result was seen, when I looked in the mirror I looked like a decent lady. Well, my villainous face still hasn't changed, but.....

And so, while I was dressed up like this, I was escorted to the party by Jared who was wearing full formal attire.

I greeted all the guests for quite a while, then I was led to the dance hall by Jared. Of course, the first dance of the day belonged to me and Jared. I'm going to have to be very careful to not step on his feet..... Time to

pay attention to my feet and dance as carefully as if my life depended on it.

“Katarina, you’re very beautiful tonight.”

“Thank you very much.”

When the blonde-haired blue-eyed prince paid me a compliment and smiled, the women around us swooned a little at the sight. Jared’s a complete package, both his appearance and abilities are all superb. That’s why, as his fiancée, I received the jealousy of all other women.

Honestly, if it’s that enviable, I want to give him up and change places with someone, but.....

When my dance with Jared finished, Keith was my next partner.

“Nee-san, you’re very beautiful.”

“Thank you.”

As my gentle stepbrother Keith smiled, just like with Jared, all the women’s eyes were on us. As the heir to Duke Claes, and not having a fiancée yet, he’s being targeted by many women. And so, his social status already attracted an endless amount of women, but his tremendous sex appeal (which unfortunately I was unable to experience) captured even more women.

Come to think of it, even though he’s so popular, I’ve never heard of him having someone he likes..... Even though we’re always together, we’ve never talked about this. If at all possible, I don’t want you to fall in love with the heroine, I really want you to find another wonderful partner instead.

After my dance with Keith finished, next up was Mary, and then it was Alan’s turn.



“You’re better than usual today.”

“.....Thank you very much.”

Alan said so rather bluntly to me. I wonder if this is supposed to be a compliment. Anyways, I’ll just say thank you.

Again, just like with Jared and Keith, the women’s glances were focused on us. Right now, this genius boy that’s said to be the poster child for being blessed by the god of music has the support of many of the older women. It seems that they were all saying, “there’s an incredible difference from an ordinary performance.” Although, I don’t really understand it.....

Well, since everyone acknowledged Alan’s fiancée Mary as a splendid lady, it seems that all of Alan’s fans are in support of his engagement to Mary. It’s such a large difference from saying people saying behind my back “other than social status, she’s completely unsuited to be with Jared” all the time.

At the end of my dance with Alan, not only the women but even the men focused their lines of sight on the appearance of the devilishly charming earl, Nico. He’s one year older than I am and has already enrolled in magic school, but he’s taking today off just for the purpose of coming to my birthday party. I took his gracefully outstretched hand, and began dancing with him.

“You’re very beautiful.”

“T, thank you very much.”

As he said so, he showed off his magical smile, and there were exclamations all around us. I’ve gotten pretty used to his magical smile over the years, but other people were like “Nico-sama smiled!” and were staggering all over the place. The devilishly charming earl, is such a frightening existence. He’s probably surrounded by people like this even at school.

A while later, after the dance was over Mary and Sophia stopped by, and praised the beauty of my hair and dress lots and lots.

And so, I turned fifteen years old without incident.

★★★★★★★★★★

Winter is here now, and the countdown before I have to enter school has begun. I'll be at school for two years, and I'm going to have to prepare the luggage that I want to take to the dorms.

Well, since I am a duke's daughter after all, it should be the servants doing the packing, but.....

I still can't leave everything up to them. That's because, if I leave it all up to them, the servants will only put in things like dresses, hair decorations, and jewelry, basically only a bunch of stuff I don't need, and they won't put my important romance novels and agriculture books into my luggage for me.

Therefore, I decided to pack my luggage myself.

So, it's been decided that five servants, led by the maid Anne, will be coming to school with me. Since I can do almost anything by myself, I said that "I won't be needing servants," but it seems that won't be possible because of our duke status. In the end, I took the smallest number of people I was allowed to, and picked five people.

However, there's someone I'm worried about among these members. My maid Anne, who's been serving me since I was eight, is now of marriageable age. During these seven years, Anne's always been taking care of me. By now, she'll be turning 23 this year. If this was the

previous world she'd still be considered young, marriageable age is shorter in this world, it's said to be too late for people if they're older than 25.

In the first place, even though Anne is working as a maid here, she's also the daughter of a baron. I am told that there's a custom in this world for the daughters of lower-class nobility to serve those of upper-class nobility to learn good manners by apprenticing themselves. And, these apprentices would often serve the daughter of the house. For that reason, there were many maids serving me that were apprenticing like this, but.....

They've really been brought up as such coddled daughters. They'll scream in terror if I climb a tree, and while I'm catching snakes they'll faint at the very sight. Therefore, there weren't many maids that stayed a long time with me, and we had to send off many maids, and every time mother would strike me down with lightning. Among them, through all the scolding, the presence of Anne remained unchanged, and I really valued her.

A few years ago, Anne's family brought up the topic of marriage.

A new maid that had just arrived, saw the way I flew from tree to tree and fainted, and quit immediately thereafter, it was because I was worrying about the topic of Anne's marriage..... If I lose Anne from my life now, I wouldn't know what to do.....

And while I was so worried, I..... When Anne's father came to pick up Anne, I told him "I really want to have Anne here with me!" and I desperately pleaded with him while lowering my head for his daughter just like a bridegroom would, and Anne's father's face became just like ice.

And so, as a result of my desperate pleading, I was somehow successful in preventing Anne from returning home to get married then. Meaning, I crushed the marriage talks involving Anne.

And then, when my mother discovered the commotion, a great thunderstorm immediately struck me, but..... The person in question, Anne herself, forgave me for everything and even laughed.

And so, I'm glad that Anne likes me as well, but I can't ask her to stay with me anymore, she's already 23 now and if she stays any longer, I won't be able to hold back my selfishness anymore.

Thus, me going to school is a good chance for Anne to return home, and I was determined to help her get a good marriage, but.....

"If I'm not here, who else would take care of ojou-sama. Of course, I'll be going to school with you," is what Anne said to me.

Honestly, the idea of having Anne leave me after she's been by my side for so long, while I'm at school facing destruction flags was a bit unsettling. Once again, by Anne's grace, she'll be coming with me together to school. I'm really grateful, Anne.

"Ojou-sama, what is this?"

Anne pulled out from my packed luggage, my work clothes with a questioning face.

"Ahh, those are my work clothes for the field."

"The field..... Ojou-sama, it couldn't be that, you're planning to work on a field even at school?"

"Of course! I mean, if I slack off from working in a field for two years, my skills will drop, and I wouldn't be able to become a splendid farmer then!"

When I declared so with all my strength, Anne seemed to have a haggard look.

".....It can't be, why is it that a duke's daughter wants to be a farmer....."

"It's for just in case!"

"What kind of just in case!? .....It can't be, are you even planning on bringing the hoe?"

"Of course, I'll be bringing it! After all, I don't know if the school will have one!"

".....Please give me a break."

After that, for the next few minutes, I kept trying to put my work clothes and the hoe into my luggage, and Anne kept trying to stop me.

Winter had finally ended, and spring was approaching.

## **21 - Working as a Claes family maid**

My name is Anne Sherry.

I was born in a countryside baron's family, and when I turned fifteen, I apprenticed myself to the Claes family and began to serve them. And so, I became the personal maid of Katarina Claes, the only daughter of Duke Claes.

The first time that I met Katarina-sama, while her face was cute in its own way, her tight, upturned eyes gave off quite the strong impression. At that time, Katarina was a typical spoiled rich brat, and she had quite the arrogant and selfish personality.

After working for such a Katarina-sama for a few months, one day Katarina-sama tripped and fell while visiting the castle garden, and hit her head strongly on a rock. That accident caused a severe cut on

Katarina-sama, and because of that, she was bedridden with a high fever for several days.

And then, when Katarina-sama woke up again, it was as if she had become a completely different person.

She always looked down on the servants so arrogantly, such a Katarina-sama who was used to living in the lap of luxury, had completely calmed down, to the point where the servants were worried about her, she's completely turned into a kind and benevolent lady.

Ojou-sama's personality must have changed because she was hit in the head and had a high fever. She's become a calm and friendly lady..... While the servants were shocked at first, it turned into joy afterwards. Right now, Katarina-sama was only able to get out of bed for a little time at a while.

After her fever subsided, and Katarina-sama was able to get out of bed..... She became even more of a problem child than before she had hit her head.

When Katarina-sama got out of bed, for some reason she ran off to the library with bloodshot eyes, and kept confusing the butler with her eccentric behavior..... Just after I thought she's calmed down a bit, now she's breathing excitedly while declaring that she would begin training in swordsmanship and magic.....

And so she began her swordsmanship practice but, only her fervor was praiseworthy, her movements were so clumsy that it seemed more likely she would injure herself before hitting her opponent, and it was scary to be near her.

And after that, saying she was going to train her magic power, she put on work clothes, began digging in the earth with a hoe, and began to create a field in the esteemed Claes family garden.

And she would always spend most of her time in the garden, and do things like roll up her dress and climb a tree, or fish in the small stream in the garden, she almost drove all the fish in the stream to extinction.

Thus, she caused an endless amount of problems, and no matter how many times her mother got angry at her, it did nothing to affect Katarina-sama. Sure, she'll be depressed right after being scolded, but the next day she'll bounce right back to her usual self.

It seems that, no matter how angry you get at Katarina-sama, she has a downright enviable ability to forget about everything the next day.

And now, she'll be turning 15 this year, but unfortunately Katarina-sama hasn't changed one bit.

At least she doesn't climb trees in a dress anymore, but..... This one time, she kept insisting on her own that a mushroom growing in the garden was "definitely edible," and upset her stomach after eating it, and lightning descended upon Katarina after her mother found out..... And now for some reason she's suddenly decided to study agriculture, rummaging through books on agriculture, and she's been working at enlarging her field. Really, she hasn't changed at all since she was eight. I've served beside her for seven years now, but I'm still completely unable to predict her actions or understand her thoughts.

However, even though Katarina-sama is such a terrible problem child..... She's very popular with some people.

For example, Katarina-sama's fiance, the third prince of this country, Prince Jared Stuart. Prince Jared, who's very handsome and excellent, seems to be quite enamored with Katarina-sama. Whenever Prince Jared is with Katarina-sama, he seems to be having a lot of fun, and his expression looks like he loves Katarina-sama to the point where he can't bear to be without her.

Even though he has such an expression directed at her, it seems that Katarina-sama hasn't noticed Prince Jared's feelings at all.

At the time when the incredibly dense Katarina-sama tried to cancel the engagement, Prince Jared was truly frightening to behold.

It was because the scar that caused Prince Jared to become engaged to Katarina-sama had completely disappeared.

One day, when Katarina-sama noticed that the scar she received when she was eight had vanished, she was overjoyed. However, I never even dreamed that she would use that as an opportunity to suggest cancelling her engagement to Prince Jared.

Even though Prince Jared obviously loved Katarina-sama so much, I realized for the first time then that she's been completely oblivious to everything.

"Prince Jared, the scar on my forehead has disappeared. That means that you won't have to take responsibility for me anymore, and can cancel the engagement."

When Katarina-sama informed him so happily, Prince Jared opened his eyes wide and seemed rather shocked, but then..... After that, his smile immediately returned. However, there was no laughter in his eyes.

"Oh, really? Why don't you show me."

Prince Jared approached Katarina-sama, and rather forcefully parted her bangs to the side. Even though her forehead should be completely healed and all the scars gone, but.....

"On the contrary, a few scars remain."

Prince Jared said so as he stared at Katarina-sama's forehead which was perfectly unblemished.

"Eh!? But I confirmed it in the mirror many times..... I even showed Anne....."



Wait a minute, Katarina-sama, please don't get me involved in this.....

"Well, that's wrong. There's still some scars remaining. Hey, don't you think so as well?"

Even though Prince Jared was smiling beautifully, his eyes were staring at me without any sign of laughter. I was so scared of him, that I simply agreed with him by nodding my head vigorously.

And so, even though the scars have completely disappeared, Prince Jared insisted that they didn't, and said firmly that "the engagement absolutely can't be cancelled" as he smiled with no laughter in his eyes, ending this conversation.

Honestly, I was so terrified that I felt like I had lost several years from my lifespan.

Then, about Katarina-sama's stepbrother, Keith Claes-sama. The first time I met him, Keith-sama was a skinny, gloomy boy, but now he's a handsome young man that many women are chasing after. And, since he treated all women gently and kindly, he was very popular. Moreover, as he grew, he's begun to emit a tremendous amount of sex appeal. Honestly, amongst the servants as well, several have fallen for Keith-sama's sex appeal.

Keith-sama is also absolutely crazy about Katarina-sama. He would always go wherever Katarina-sama went, it was as if he was her shadow.

And, with the passionate way he looked at Katarina-sama, it was clear he had more than brotherly feelings for her.

However, of course the incredibly dense Katarina-sama wouldn't notice Keith-sama's gaze either. That's not all, she seems to be completely unaware of Keith-sama's overflowing sex appeal. It's as expected of her.

"People say that I'm so sexy..... But if the person in question that I'm in love with doesn't notice anything, isn't it all useless in the end....."

Coincidentally, I once heard Keith-sama muttering so to himself with a sad face. He seemed really pitiful.

Such a Keith-sama allied himself with Katarina-sama's mother, with both of them saying "Katarina (nee-san) isn't fit to be a prince's bride," and they fought together to cancel the engagement, but unfortunately for them, they've been unsuccessful so far due to Prince Jared's interference.

Also, the fourth prince of this country, Prince Jared's younger twin brother, Prince Alan Stuart, is yet another person that's head over heels in love with Katarina-sama.

He's called the poster child for being blessed by the god of music, Prince Alan is known for his talent everywhere, and the streets are always filled to the brim with people that want to hear him perform. He would always invite Katarina-sama every time.

And, the way that Prince Alan looks at Katarina-sama, it's almost like he's overflowing with affection.

However, there's one regrettable thing about Prince Alan, it's that even after seven years of affectionately gazing at Katarina-sama, he still hasn't seemed to realize his own feelings. Not having realized that he's clearly in love with Katarina-sama, I think the way he seems as he stays by her is somewhat pitiful as well.

But, I know that it's not just a problem of Prince Alan being dense. Since Prince Jared and Keith-sama don't want their rivals to increase even more, they're making sure that Prince Alan doesn't notice his own feelings.

In particular, someone that's really amazing among Katarina-sama's admirers is Prince Alan's fiancée, Mary Hunt-sama.

And that's because, the normal situation would be, Mary-sama wouldn't want Katarina-sama stealing Prince Alan away from her, but..... I know that's not what's happening here.

Mary-sama is yet another person that's completely fallen for Katarina-sama.

When I first met Prince Alan's fiancée, Mary Hunt-sama, she was really such a nervous and shy little girl, but in these seven years she's become recognized by society and transformed into a splendid lady among ladies.

Such a lady is really quite in love with Katarina-sama.

If you ask me just how much she loves her..... It's to the extent where she wants to break the engagement to Prince Jared, and run away with Katarina-sama to another country, monopolizing her all to herself.

Mary-sama began enacting her plan several years ago. At one time, Mary-sama happened to tell Katarina-sama that Mary's "not fit to be someone important like a prince's wife." After hearing such a perfect Mary complain, of course Katarina-sama would become unsettled as she's even less like a noble girl.

Katarina-sama said that "then, I'm even more unfit for it. Whatever should I do?" When Mary-sama saw how dejected Katarina-sama was, she told her gently "let's run away together to another country and break off our engagements" as she took her hands.

At first, I thought it was just a joke, but.....

Mary-sama actually began to make preparations and plan for how to escape to another country..... I finally realized she was for serious. Mary-sama really intends to break off the engagements, and take Katarina-sama away with her to another country.....

However, of course the incredibly dense Katarina-sama had no chance at all of noticing that Mary-sama was being serious..... She's still giggling and saying that "Mary's such a nice girl."

And even though the twin princes, her stepbrother, and even the prince's fiancée are all madly in love with her..... She has no idea whatsoever about her popularity.

The prime minister's son, Nico Astarot-sama, is yet another person that's smitten with Katarina-sama.

With black hair and eyes, and a perfect doll-like face, when the handsome Nico-sama made his social debut last year, it's amazing how fast he immediately acquired his own fan club. Not only that, not only were there women in his fan club, it seems that it even included many men.

If we're just talking about beauty, Prince Jared, Prince Alan, and Keith-sama are all very handsome as well, but Nico-sama has a strange captivating aura about him. Katarina-sama would always call him "the devilishly charming earl."

As for Nico-sama, he was mostly expressionless, and hardly ever talked, and there were very few people in his fan club that had seen his different facial expressions before, but.....

Such a Nico-sama would always smile so happily in front of Katarina-sama only. It's really a smile that will melt people's hearts, anyone that sees it will automatically lose their hearts to him..... That smile has already broken so many people among the servants.....

However, as expected, the incredibly dense Katarina-sama never noticed that Nico-sama only behaved differently in front of her..... She would gasp that she absolutely had to "properly defend Mary and Keith from being captured by the devilish charm."

Just like how she couldn't feel Keith-sama's sex appeal at all, Nico-sama's magical smile had no effect on her as well.

Then, that Nico-sama's younger sister, Sophia Ascarot, is also in love with Katarina-sama.

As Katarina-sama's fellow romance novel enthusiast, she would always come over happily while recommending another book.

I already realized early on that Sophia-sama seems to have special feelings for her brother Nico-sama, but she kept earnestly appealing to Katarina-sama about how wonderful her brother was.....

Of course, the incredibly dense Katarina-sama didn't notice anything, and would arbitrarily say that "Sophia is really so nice to her onii-chan~" and misunderstand things.

In this manner, even though there's so many problems with Katarina-sama, she seems to be popular with everyone for some reason. Keith-sama seems to call her a "clueless harem protagonist."

Katarina-sama's harem didn't seem to be limited to only her noble friends.

The head gardener Tom, who hardly ever interacted with people, always seemed to have so much fun with Katarina-sama, when he was always so strict with both himself and others. Also, the head maid would always show Katarina-sama a gentle expression that she's never shown to others before.

No matter how old she gets, this noble girl only causes problems and thinks completely outside the box, exactly what on earth attracts people to Katarina-sama..... Why is everyone in love with her.....

Even though I say so, actually..... I already know.

★★★★★★★★★★

I was born as Anne Sherry. My father is Baron Sherry, and my mother is one of his family servants. I grew up in a small house that was close by the Sherry mansion.

I was conceived in the mood of the moment, and mother would always tell me that she was Baron Sherry's mistress for only a very short time.

"Please do as the Baron-sama says, and if he likes you you'll be able to move up in the world. Never be rebellious."

Those words were repeated to me so much that they were engraved into my body and soul.

I obeyed those words, and did as the baron said according to mother's wishes, and never said anything against him, and was thus liked by him and moved up in the world.

As a result, while I wasn't called to go live in the baron's mansion, he didn't treat me badly, and I was able to live comfortably.

However..... Those days finally had to come to an end.

It happened when I turned 15. Suddenly, a fire started in our house, and everything was gone in an instant.

I managed to escape somehow with only a big burn on my back, but my mother passed away.

While I was stunned at the sudden turn of events, the baron summoned me to his mansion for the first time since I was born.

"You have a terrible burn scar on your back now. That means that you're useless now as a marriage candidate. I don't need you anymore. Get out of here immediately."

He said so as naturally as if he was saying “the weather’s nice today, isn’t it,” and I just stood there without saying anything back to him.

Up until now, I’ve been trying my hardest to gain the baron’s favor. I had gotten conceited because he never treated me badly. But, I think I made a mistake. He didn’t treat me badly because, he never had any interest in me..... To the baron, I was only a political tool..... And.....

An existence that he didn’t need anymore.....

Thus, having lost both my place to live and reason to be, I came to see Duke Claes who was distantly related to me, and was hired as a maid and began apprenticing myself here. And so, I became the personal maid of Katarina Claes, the only daughter of Duke Claes.

Probably because Katarina-sama had such a spoiled upbringing, she was really selfish, and treated us servants so arrogantly, that Katarina-sama’s personal maids would never last very long, but.....

I didn’t quit like all the others. I mean, the other girls are able to go back home if they don’t like it here and want to quit, but I don’t have a home to go back to anymore. If I’m chased out of here, I won’t have anywhere else to go.

I had always listened to my mother, never going against the baron, trying to gain his favor to move up in the world.

So whatever Katarina-sama says, anything she wants, I won’t object to anything, I’ll fulfill my master’s demands, and become whatever master wishes.....

And so, serving her like this, I was able to please her, and I passed my days without any problems. I was already living like this originally. All that’s changed is the master I now serve.

It would be great if I can get accustomed to becoming a tool again here.

However..... Ever since Katarina-sama was hit on the head with a rock, she's changed.

Her arrogance and selfish words disappeared. She didn't want people to toady to her like before either.

She became an extremely unorthodox noble girl that climbed trees, and plowed fields. How I can gain her favor, and what to do in order to please her, I have absolutely no idea anymore.

Up until now, I always lived trying to please others, and lived as others wished, I've never known how to live by my own will.

And so, I was extremely confused about how to get close to her now, but..... Before I realized it, I've learned how to speak up on my own and think for myself.

I didn't have to flatter and toady to Katarina-sama all the time like before, and this Katarina-sama wasn't so pompous and didn't treat me badly..... But on the contrary, I longed for it.

I received my first-ever birthday present from her. It was a ticket that said "shoulder rub" on it in rather crooked letters, and every year from then on she would make me a wooden toy animal that I didn't recognize, and I cherished them and stored all of them very carefully.

When that unbelievable Katarina-sama appeared, my daily life underwent a great change, but..... It was incomparable to my previous fifteen years of living in separation, and every day I got to experience new and fun things.

Just like this, I always want to stay beside Katarina-sama. Imperceptibly, I had begun to think like this.



Several years after coming to the Claes mansion, I received a letter from Baron Sherry who had never contacted me here before.

All it said was “your marriage has been decided upon, return to the mansion.”

It was as if all my blood drained from my body. A marriage was decided for me..... Even though I thought I had been discarded as a political tool because of the burn scar on my back.....

If it was the me from before, I would have returned to the mansion immediately upon receiving this letter. I’m just a tool to the baron..... But I can’t disobey my master.....

But..... I wasn’t the me from before anymore. I wanted to stay here.

That’s why, I tried to ignore the letter.....

Despite that, a few weeks later, Baron Sherry himself came to visit Duke Claes.

When I was called out to meet him, Baron Sherry was sitting there, looking unchanged from several years ago.

“I found a generous partner for you who’s willing to take you even though you’re damaged goods. What’s more, since you haven’t returned yet, I even took the trouble of coming to pick you up myself.”

He told me to be thankful about my marriage partner, who happened to be a man with a facial deformity, with many bad rumors floating about him in society, he was a rather elderly viscount with more mistresses than could be counted.

For this marriage proposal, Baron Sherry will probably be paid a considerable sum, but..... I definitely wouldn’t be able to find happiness. In the first place, I’ve begun to wonder if it’s wrong for a tool

to want to find her own happiness. It was as if I'd lost all the blood in my body again, and I completely froze up.

"What are you taking so long for. I've already talked to Duke Claes-sama about everything, so let's get going! Time to return to the mansion!"

Because I was just standing there silently, he became impatient with me.

Ahh, are my happy days here over now..... Am I going to be just a tool again..... I wanted to stay here longer..... By Katarina-sama's side..... While I was thinking that, it happened.

"Excuse me."

Right after knocking, the person that immediately burst into the room, was my ojou-sama, Katarina-sama.

"You're Anne's father, right?"

".....Uhh, yeah..."

As she asked so, Katarina-sama was looking at Baron Sherry with a sharp gaze. Suddenly, the girl that had burst in, lowered her head towards Baron Sherry and began pleading.

"I have a request! Please reconsider the matter of Anne's marriage!"

Katarina-sama grabbed my arm as she said so.

"I really want to have Anne here with me! I absolutely need her beside me! So please, I'll be troubled if you take her away!"

As Katarina-sama begged, the baron opened his eyes wide in shock and she bowed down even further.

Looking at the way the two of them looked, it was as if they were from completely different worlds.

Katarina-sama's hand that's gripping my arm is really warm. And, her body heat began warming up my frozen body.

I had always been living as just a tool for the sake of my master. But, while in the Claes family..... While beside Katarina-sama, I learned how to think for myself for the first time. Before I realized it, I wasn't just a tool anymore.

I'm no longer a tool, I'm just Anne Sherry..... What's more, I'm needed..... She's saying that she wants to have me by her side.

Without noticing, my body that was completely frozen had become warm again. It was especially warm in the inner corners of my eyes. I was holding back my tears that were about to overflow.

In the end, because of Katarina-sama's interference, my marriage proposal was cancelled, but..... After that, when Duke Claes heard about how horrible my proposed partner was, he completely broke off all ties to Baron Sherry. I'm really very grateful to Duke Claes.

What's more, being worried about my welfare, Duke Claes said "if you would like, I'll do my best to find a proper marriage partner for you," but.....

I just want to stay like this and continue serving Katarina-sama.

Thus, I continued working as Katarina-sama's personal maid in the Claes family.

No matter how old she gets, this noble girl only causes problems and thinks completely outside the box, exactly what on earth attracts people to Katarina-sama..... Why is everyone in love with her.....

Even though I say so, actually..... I already know. More than anyone.....

Even though I was once just a tool to be used, I've become a human known as Anne Sherry.

I'll never forget the warmth I experienced from her words and hand on the day that she grabbed my arm.

Of course, I'll be going with her starting next year to magic school. Katarina said something like "I'll be fine by myself," but..... She can't even put on a dress properly by herself, and if you leave her alone she won't even comb her hair, there's no way she'll be fine by herself.

"Of course, I'll be accompanying you," is what I told her as she looked so dejected.

"But, Anne should be thinking about getting married now, I can't always take you along with me....."

It seems that she's a bit worried about my marriage prospects, and I laughed a little. Honestly speaking, I have no interest in getting married. I only have one wish.

"If I'm not here, who else would take care of ojou-sama. Of course, I'll be going to school with you."

When I said so, Katarina-sama became so happy.

From now on, whether Katarina-sama becomes Prince Jared's bride as promised and goes to live in the castle, or even if Mary-sama succeeds in whisking her away to a distant land, I intend to keep following her wherever she may go.

After all, the place where I belong..... The place where I'm the happiest..... Is right next to Katarina-sama~

I only have one wish, Katarina-sama, to always be by your side

## **22 – Together again**

My name is Sasaki Atsuko. I'm thirteen. I just enrolled in a local middle school the other day.

And so, I spent my days in the restless atmosphere of the classroom reading books in the seat farthest in the back. The girls around me that had come from various elementary schools seemed to be making new groups rapidly.

Originally, I should have also joined a group, and be having friendly conversations right now, but..... I'm not very good at this kind of thing..... What would be good to say, is it alright to join them, I have no clue whatsoever.

During elementary school, while I spent my days puzzled like this before I noticed it I had become always alone.

And so, when everyone was together I was always out of the loop, or completely ignored because I didn't fit in, or teased, or sometimes they would even hide my stuff.

As I spent my days like this, before I realized it I became afraid of other people, and I didn't speak very much to anyone at all.

Because of that, even though I've come to middle school now and it's a brand new environment..... I still can't approach people and have a conversation.

That's why, I was only able to watch the people around me that seemed so happy, and read a book that I brought from home by myself.

From manga to novels, I loved all sorts of books.

While reading a book, once I entered the story, it became possible to forget the lonely feeling of being all alone.

While reading, I would imagine that I was the main character of the story. Even I who was always alone with my head buried in a book, could become a popular, amazing girl in a story.

So, I opened a book as usual today. In order to escape from my lonely reality.....

And as the days passed like this, it became a few weeks since I entered middle school.

After my homeroom class ended, I would always go to the library to borrow books. In the last few weeks, that's become my daily routine. After changing my shoes at the shoe lockers, I would cut across the school courtyard where all the athletic clubs gathered and head straight for the school gate. I didn't enter any clubs. I kind of want to enter one and maybe even make some friends, but..... I didn't have the courage to go anywhere by myself.

How nice, it looks so fun. I was thinking that as I saw other girls chatting away in the school courtyard. At that time –

“Ahh~~~~”

I heard a strange cry from above me, and before I could confirm what it was, something hit me with a loud thud with a tremendous impact. It was such an impact that I immediately fell unconscious.

“Ohh, I'm really sorry.”

I woke up to someone's crying, and when I slowly opened my eyes there was a girl whose face was flooded with tears and had a runny nose in front of me. It seems that it was this girl that had been crying.

“Ahh, she's awake! She opened her eyes, sensei!”

When the girl noticed that I opened my eyes, she flew towards the other side of the white curtain.

I don't understand the situation at all. I wondered if I was still asleep. I looked around slowly. There was a white ceiling, with swaying white curtains next to me, and I was in a white bed.

I don't know where this is, but it seems like it's somewhere inside the school, because the ceiling is the same.

Huh, I thought for sure that I was supposed to be cutting across the school courtyard.....

This time, a woman wearing white clothes appeared in front of the confused me.

"How do you feel? Is your head dizzy? Does it hurt anywhere on your body?"

The woman in the white coat asked me several questions, and I checked my body. Nothing in particular really hurts, and I think my head is fine.

".....I, I'm alright."

The woman in the white coat smiled gently when I answered her.

"Is that so, I'm really glad. But just in case, to make sure nothing really happened you should go to the hospital for a checkup. Your parents have also been contacted just now."

".....Eh? Hospital? Checkup?"

I had zero idea what was going on and I just looked at the woman in the white coat with a confused face.

"That's right. It must have happened so suddenly that you didn't even know what was going on. This is the school infirmary, and you were brought here because you fainted."

".....Fainted....."

Oh, so this is the infirmary, it's the first time that I've been here, so I didn't know where I was..... That means that this woman with the white coat is probably the infirmary's nurse. But anyways, I don't have any illnesses, and I wasn't feeling sick or anything today. Yet, why did I faint..... My confusion just increased and it was quite visible. And so, the nurse gave a wry smile at seeing my confusion.

"Well, you fainting probably didn't have anything to do with your condition at all. Unmistakably, it was caused by this child."

As she said so, the nurse indicated to the girl that was standing next to her. It's the girl from earlier, and her face was still messy with tears and her nose was still runny.

"I'm sorry!"

As she said so, she deeply lowered her head towards me.

"I finally couldn't resist the charm of the tree as it beckoned towards me..... It was going great in the beginning, but I got a little carried away..... And so my foot slipped and I fell..... And I landed on top of you..... I'm really sorry!"

At that time, come to think of it, I think heard a strange cry from above me right before something hit me really hard. So that was because this girl fell on top of me.

But anyways she's not an elementary student anymore, she's already in middle school, and on top of that, for a girl to be climbing trees..... And what does "I finally couldn't resist the charm of the tree as it beckoned towards me" mean.....

I looked again at the teary-faced girl who was desperately apologizing.

And then, I noticed. This girl's uniform's skirt..... The skirt was quite dirty with soil, and it was rather rumpled. It probably got dirty when she fell from the tree onto me..... But the thing is..... That means, this



girl climbed a tree without caring about the fact that she was wearing a skirt. She seems like such a strange child.....

“Um, I’m alright now.”

I can’t let her keep staying like this with her head bowed towards me, so I told the girl I was alright.

“.....But...”

The girl still had a troubled face and continued bowing.

“I’m really alright now, so please don’t mind it anymore.”

I was suddenly buried underneath her when she fell on me. I probably should have been more angry, but..... When this girl is being so remorseful.....

And... I just couldn’t bring myself to hate this girl who had a troubled face and was lowering her head, there was just this indescribable atmosphere around her.

“Since it wasn’t on purpose or anything, please don’t mind it at all. More importantly, are you injured? Are you okay?”

I said so to the girl while smiling.

“I’m okay. Thank you, Sasaki-san is so nice.”

The girl who had been crying up until now finally smiled.

Anyways.....

“.....Why do you know my name.....”

Why does this girl know my name? I wonder if she checked my belongings or something.

“What are you talking about? Of course I know it. After all, we’re in the same class!”

“.....!?”

I had a blank face at hearing those words and stared intently at the girl in front of me. Come to think of it, I feel like I've seen her before.

.....So that was it, she was a classmate..... In the weeks since I've enrolled in middle school, I've mostly just been reading by myself, and I haven't remembered most people's names or faces.

“.....Sorry, I haven't really remembered everyone's names and faces in the class yet.”

Even though you remember me, I'm really sorry that I didn't remember you. What if she's unhappy because of that? As if to dispel my worries, she grinned widely.

“So that's it. Then, once again, I'm year one, class three's –”

The girl held her hand out to me as she introduced herself. When I instinctively shook her hand in return, the smile spread over her entire face.

“From now on, I'll be in your care.”

The girl's hand that I was holding onto was very warm.

And so, from that day on, my days of being by myself underwent a great change. Just like her words “from now on, I'll be in your care,” the tree climbing girl began to interact with me from the next day on for some reason, and before I realized it became my first friend.

And so –

“A-chan~~, help me~~”

My friend hugged me from behind while begging me for help in a pathetic voice.

“.....What is it this time?”

I listened to her as calmly as possible.

“The English translation was today, but I thought it was on another day, and forgot all about it..... And before this time, since I’d forgotten about it the previous two times as well the teacher told me “if you forget any more times, you’ll be punished by having to do the sweeping.....”

I was amazed at my friend’s hapless face and sighed.

“.....I think you forget too many things.....”

While being shocked, I loaned my English notes to my friend, and a smile magically appeared.

“Be sure to return them after English class.”

“A-chan-sama, thank you very much!”

After saying so, the friend that had just lowered her head to me dashed desperately back to her seat, and began copying my notes.

“Sasaki-san, you seem to have gotten completely used to taking care of that monkey.”

One of the girls that sat close to me and my friend in class said so with a wry smile.

“.....Monkey?”

“Yes, monkey. That’s been her nickname since elementary school. I went to the same school as her.”

As she answered my question, she gave yet another wry smile.

“She would move around from tree to tree during recess, and she would always be playing around in the nearby mountains, and there were even rumors in the neighborhood that ‘there’s huge monkeys in that mountain’ because of her.”

“.....That’s really quite something.”

Indeed, if she was like that back in elementary school, climbing a tree at school in a skirt would be nothing to her even though she’s now in middle school.

“Moreover, just like today she always forgets her homework, and the teacher is always angry at her, yet she’ll just forget everything the next day again..... She’ll always forget to bring it.”

“.....That’s really quite something.”

Indeed, my friend always seems depressed immediately after being scolded, but the next day, she’ll be completely back to herself again.

It seems that, no matter how angry you get at my friend, she has a downright enviable ability to forget about everything the next day. However, is this actually good for the person in question..... It must be hard on everyone around her.

When I said “it must be hard on everyone else” to her, her expression became a bit profound.

“But, like..... There’s something fun about being together with her for some reason.”

When the girl smiled and laughed as she said so, I also smiled on reflex.

And after that, she told me many legends about my friend’s elementary school days.

Thus, before I realized it I had become friends with the monkey’s friends as well as a lot of other people.

And so, a bit later, the monkey that had always been playing in the hills and fields, got interested in anime and manga due to my influence.

Thanks to that, the monkey was no longer roaming the hills like before, and her parents even thanked me for 'making the monkey into a human.'"

Since I finally had a friend interested in the same hobbies as me, I got even more addicted to anime and manga.

And then both of us turned into splendid otakus, and we became best friends.

And so, as we developed our otaku friendship, and spent three years in middle school together, we were supposed to go to the nearby high school together, but.....

"A-chan..... I can't go on anymore..... I'll leave the rest to you....."

As my best friend said so and closed the textbook, I smacked her in the head with a loud "thump!"

"What are you saying..... Isn't it just your first time getting 10 points? But if it's like that, you won't be able to enter high school, you know....."

"Urgh..... But, like, whenever I look at all the words in this thick reference book, I get drowsy..... There's no doubt about it, this reference book is surely cursed!"

And so, I deeply sighed at my best friend who only got 10 points on a test and couldn't study at all.

My best friend is good at athletics, but is completely useless at academics. Rather than saying she's not that smart, I think it's just that she has no interest instead.

Honestly, I was able to teach her some things for our school's tests, but..... As expected of high school entrance exams, I can't help her.

What should I do..... At this rate, we won't be able to go to high school together, and she really might fail to get into high school. I think, the way to motivate her is to.....

"Okay! After this next test ends, let's play my secretly hoarded otome game to our heart's content!"

".....O, otome game? .....Uh....."

I bought an "otome game" with my New Year's money recently, and it's a new genre that I had just gotten addicted to. Originally, I wanted to play it together with my best friend, and talk about it with her, but.....

My best friend has a rather simple personality where she thinks "it's a waste if you have a lot of money and don't spend it," and because of this her parents decided not to give her any New Year's money, and forcibly deposited it for her to save instead. Because of this, my best friend can't buy anything expensive on her own. As such, not only does she not have games, she doesn't even have a game console.

But, I don't have the extra money to buy and loan an extra game console to her either..... Since my best friend was always staring in jealousy at mine, I felt very sorry for her.

".....But, A-chan. I don't have a game console....."

As my best friend said so, she looked a little down. I gave the best smile I possibly could to her.

"We'll rent one! If you properly pass your test, we'll rent a game console for a while!"

".....A, A-chan-sama....."

My best friend was looking at me with her eyes sparkling.

"Thank you A-chan! For the sake of the otome game, I'll make sure to pass the high school entrance exams!"

She said so in a loud voice.

Thus, although there's a problem in why she was motivated to get into high school, my best friend put in the effort, and was able to splendidly pass the exams and attend the same high school as me.

Even more luckily, to celebrate her passing the exam and getting into high school, my best friend's parents bought her a game console, and so she immediately borrowed my otome game and got hooked on it.

In high school, we gained more otaku friends. In order to buy more manga and games, I got a part time job together with my best friend, as always I would support her when she forgot her homework, and we spent our days full of life and energy.

Being always alone reading a book when I was in elementary school, spending my days without talking to anyone seemed almost to have been a lie now.

Every day was so lively and fun, even though my best friend is a problem child, I still love her. I thought that my days would always continue like this from now on. That's what I believed.

Then one day, on the day that I coincidentally forgot my cell phone at home, when we were both in our second year of high school, my best friend didn't come to school.

"Come to think of it, that girl, she didn't come over to play today," is all I thought at the time.

And then, after school ended, I learned that it wouldn't be possible to meet my best friend anymore.

Every day that I had been taking for granted..... Ended so suddenly.

At the wake, or at the funeral..... I couldn't even cry. In the first place, I couldn't believe that I wouldn't be able to meet my best friend anymore like this.

I mean, since it's that girl, she might even unexpectedly come back somehow.....

After her funeral ended, my days still went on like normal. But, no matter how much I held out hope or waited, my best friend still didn't come back.

And then after a few days had passed, I finally noticed that I had one unread message from her in my smartphone.

Since I was busy mourning her death at the wake and contacting all our friends..... But I didn't realize it until now. I wonder when she sent it?

And when I opened it, I saw the familiar name of my best friend again.

It was sent in the middle of the night on the morning she died.

"A-chan. I'm having trouble capturing the sadistic evil prince~"

The message was accompanied with an emoticon of a troubled face, my best friend was probably getting pretty desperate about the otome game.....

Her final message is something like this..... Even at the very end, it just seems so like her.

I started laughing at thinking how amusing it was.

I laughed and laughed until tears started coming out.



And then, the tears kept overflowing, without reserve..... They kept flowing and flowing until I thought my eyes would melt.....

Although that girl isn't here anymore, I'm not alone anymore. After all, that girl gave me a new world.....

I tightly clenched my smartphone that contained that girl's final message.

That girl won't come back anymore..... I lived my days without that girl from now on.

I can live properly in this new world that she had given me.

So..... If it could be like in the stories, when my life is over, I can be reincarnated into a new life.....

At that time –

I want to be with that girl and be friends again.....

Once more, I want to spend every day energetically and having fun with her.

★★★★★★★★★★

“.....Sophia-sama, Sophia-sama.”

When I heard a voice calling me and opened my eyes, a maid was looking at me very anxiously from next to my bed. It seems that she was the one who was calling me.

“.....What's the matter?”

I responded while not being fully awake yet.

“.....Um, it seemed that you were having quite a nightmare, are you alright?”

“.....I was having a nightmare?”

When I woke up some more and looked at myself, I noticed that my cheeks were wet. Ahh, so I was crying..... And there must have been a reason for it.

“I just had a very sad dream, that must be it, but it wasn’t a nightmare.”

“A dream?”

“Yes, a very, very, sad dream..... But after waking up, I can’t quite remember exactly what it was about anymore.”

Yes, I remember that it was a very sad dream..... Even though I don’t remember the contents anymore.

“I think it was probably about something that happened a long time ago, though.”

“.....Something a long time ago.....”

At my comment, the maid froze up with an indescribable expression.

After all, I had been living a sheltered life for many years, due to all the slander I received for my different appearance. She was probably wondering what I meant by a long time ago.

“.....Well, uh. I’m not talking about from when I had to start living a sheltered life. I’m talking about something even farther, much earlier than that.....”

Hearing so, the maid had a wondering expression on her face.

Well, that’s only natural. There should be no way for me to remember something that far back when I’m not even an adult yet.....

Honestly, even I myself, don't understand it very well..... I can't remember the contents of that very, very, sad dream.....

But for sure, I'm convinced that it was about something long ago.....

And so, even though I don't remember the dream in detail, a very sad painful feeling remained in my chest, and I was despondent.

And so, while I was feeling downcast, the maid said something that cheered me up.

"Sophia-sama, today's the day that you're supposed to visit the Claes family."

At hearing that, the sad painful feelings in my chest lightened a little.

That's right. Today, I'm supposed to visit Katarina-sama's family to go over and play.

I chose a book to recommend to her yesterday, I wonder if she'll be happy with it. As I thought about Katarina-sama, my mood improved.

After getting dressed properly and having breakfast, and finishing all the preparations I headed over to the Claes mansion with my brother coming along as usual.

When I arrived at the Claes mansion, Katarina was in the garden like usual. As always, her stepbrother Keith-sama was together with her.

"Keith, this mushroom is definitely edible, I'm telling you."

"No, nee-san, an unknown mushroom growing on the side of a tree, you absolutely can't eat it."

"No, no, this is definitely edible. After all, they have the same smell as shiitake. This is absolutely something similar to shiitake."

“What’s shiitake..... Anyways, you absolutely aren’t allowed to eat unknown mushrooms. You’ll get your stomach upset.”

“No, if you don’t try it you’ll never know if it’s edible or not..... Oh, Sophia!”

Somehow, Katarina-sama that was arguing with Keith-sama finally noticed me.

And then she welcomed me with a big grinning face.

At seeing that smile, some more of the sad painful feelings in my chest disappeared.

I’m really glad that I joined the tea party on that day several years ago. I’m really happy to have met Katarina Claes-sama on that day.

“Katarina-sama, I brought you a new book as a recommendation today.”

“Really!? Thank you, Sophia!”

As I said so and brought out the book, Katarina-sama was jumping up and down in joy.

Every day I spend with Katarina-sama is so lively and fun.

I’m really happy to have been able to become friends with Katarina-sama.

Before I realized it, all the remaining sad painful feelings in my chest completely vanished.

**Side story 2 – Working as the Claes family head maid**

I was born as the third of three girls to a merchant family, and I began working for the Claes family as a maid when I turned 16.

Both my older sisters had good personalities, and were cute and lovely, with many offers of marriage received. And so, my oldest sister eventually got married, and my second sister got married as well after that. However, compared to my sisters, I'm not as attractive as they are, and I'm also bad at getting along with others.

I had rather sharp features, and talking is hard for me, I couldn't even make any friends, much less get a lover.

And so, I graduated from school without having made any friends, and I remained in the house, without receiving marriage offers like my sisters. If I keep staying in the house like this, before long, it'll surely trouble my family, so I went to work for the Claes family which has had a long relationship with our family business.

I already realized a long time ago that I wouldn't be able to get happily married like other women, so for the time being I just worked as hard as I could.

And so, I worked harder and more seriously than anyone else, ten years later, before I realized it I've already become the head maid. It's just that, the previous head maid just happened to retire, so I got the position unexpectedly. After I became the head maid, so that I wouldn't be looked down upon for being so young for the position, I devoted myself even more to my work and became stricter.

And so, despite my hard work and effort, because of my sharp features, because I'm bad at communicating with others, and because I became even stricter so that people won't look down on me for my age, I had turned into a person that all the other servants avoided before I realized it.

But even so, in order to “live on by myself,” I dedicated myself to my work even more furiously.

My hobbies were that I liked cute things, and to make sweet candies. Fluttery cute dresses, adorable stuffed animals, fairy tales about princesses, and sweet candies are what I love.

But since my hobbies didn’t suit the way I look and act, I’ve always been teased about it ever since I was young, so I started hiding my hobbies so that people around me wouldn’t find out anymore.

Since eating sweet candies doesn’t fit my image, even when everyone else is having some I would always say “I don’t eat sweet things.” Because of that, even though one of my hobbies is to make sweet candies, I can only eat them secretly by myself when I’m not busy.....

A couple of years ago, when I was still a regular maid, I was sitting in a corner of the garden by myself and eating sweets secretly in between work.

A few days ago, one of my fellow maids had gotten married, and left the mansion. After sending off this coworker of mine that had worked with me for so long, I couldn’t think of anything to do other than stare blankly at the bushes in front of me. I’m not personable, I don’t have anyone that I like and I know that it’s impossible for me to get married, but..... Even so..... I’m envious of how happy my coworkers seem to be.....

In a fairy tale I once read as a child, right now, a magician should appear from the bushes in front of me, and change me into a wonderful princess, and it’ll be great if I can be carried off by a prince — as I was letting my imagination run wild like a child again, that’s when it happened.

From within the bushes, I heard a rustling sound, and a girl that was covered in leaves appeared. And so, the girl that had appeared from the

bushes was..... the daughter of Duke Claes. She was staring at the sweets that I was eating and her stomach was growling loudly.

“.....Do you want some?”

Since she was staring so intently, I offered her some by reflex.

“Is that okay!?”

The ojou-sama was so pleased that she immediately flew over here.

And so, after ojou-sama ate the sweets I made..... For some reason, she was quite enamored with my sweets, even though it's just the work of an amateur, and from then on she would always come to me begging for sweets.

All my coworkers were scared of me and avoided me, but only ojou-sama was different, and she had gotten used to me. Whenever I'm with ojou-sama, I feel really calm as well.

However, ojou-sama was about to turn 15 soon, and she'll be entering magic school. Her personal maid Anne seems to be going with her.

Honestly, I want ojou-sama to take me too, but I can't considering that I'm the head maid here, so I'll endure these very lonely feelings, and send off the ojou-sama.

And so, a few days after ojou-sama left for magic school.

“Um, excuse me.”

When I was about to eat some candy alone in the corner of the garden as always, I suddenly heard a voice. Up until now, ojou-sama was the only one that would ever come here. But, ojou-sama has already left for school..... Who on earth could it be?

When I looked back in surprise, standing there was a young man that's been working here in the Claes family as a gardener for several years.

He's really tall, he's serious and sincere and is quite popular among the maids, and the maids often gossip about him..... As for me personally, I don't participate in gossiping.

".....Yes?"

I asked him while being quite shaken.

".....Uh, actually, I really love sweet candies, and ojou-sama happened to share your sweet candies with me several times..... And so, I'm a big fan of your sweet candies..... If it's not too much trouble, could you share some with me from now on?"

".....S, sure..."

Seeing how completely red his face was, my face turned bright red as well, and I nodded. And so, by reflex, I gave some candies to the young man as well, and he laughed so happily.

A while later, even though I had once given up on ever getting married, I was able to start my own family, but that's a story for another time.

And so, I'll always believe this. That day, the person that emerged from those bushes — was actually — a magician that granted me happiness.

## **23 – I enrolled in magic school**

Spring is here now, and I've finally enrolled in magic school. Magic school, just like its name, is a school where I will learn and train in magic.

People with magic power that reach 15, will be gathered here by the country, and will have to undergo two years of strict education here at the dorms.

This school is run by the country, and it's the largest one of its kind.



Within its gigantic campus, besides the school itself, there's also student and teacher dorms, as well as various magic research facilities and other structures.

By the way, there's a reason for the country to sponsor such splendid facilities.

That's because people with magical power, and the magic they wield are considered important national treasures.

In other countries, there are very few people that are born with magic power. It's not zero, but it seems to be extremely rare.

In comparison to other countries, our country has more people born with magic power, and we raise them to be the best. That's why our country has put so much into developing everyone's magic power.

Thus, we're considered national treasures, precious to the country.

In order to help us, the national treasures, be able to use magic better, and to discover people with extremely high talent in magic, that's why our country is sponsoring magic school.

At this school, if a person is recognized for having powerful magic, they'll be granted power just below that of the king's, and will receive a position in the powerful organization similar to a ministry of magic.

And so, each year, everyone with magic power that's turned 15 is gathered here, but..... They're almost all nobles.

That's right, even though our country has more magic users than other countries, it's almost entirely made up of the nobility and other people with high social status.

Because of that, whether or not you have magic, and how good your magic is, can be considered a mark of noble status, having powerful magic can also get you adopted by the nobility, so by the time people reach 15, most of them will be enrolling in school as a noble.

But of course, it's not only nobles that have magic power. It's really rare, but sometimes there are commoners that are also born with magic power. And so, commoners as well are required to enroll in magic school.

However, commoners born with magic power are so rare that, it seems that there haven't been any commoner students in magic school for ten years.

And now, after ten years, a commoner with magic power has finally enrolled in magic school.

Maria Campbell. She's one of those rare commoners with magic power, and on top of that with light magic.

Among the five different types of magic, there's very few people with the strongest type, light magic. It's said that you can count the number of people with it in our country on one hand.

Obviously, all attention would of course be focused on Maria Campbell who's a commoner with light magic. Starting from the entrance ceremony, all eyes would be on her.

And so, I followed everyone's line of sight, and found her.

She has beautiful, flowing blonde hair and clear blue eyes, she's a beautiful girl. By reflex, I began admiring her beauty.

Maria Campbell is a "commoner" with "light magic," I'm sure that she's the most special girl in this entire school, or rather entire country, even.

Well, the main character of the otome game "Fortune Lover" is definitely here.

It's finally time for the heroine's appearance and for the game to begin. From now until the end of the game next year, it's time for Katarina Claes to do battle with the destruction flags.

"I definitely won't lose to some destruction flags!" I clenched my fist and swore so to myself.

I was trying to do my best after the entrance ceremony, but.....

Just a few days after I've enrolled in magic school, I'm already being overwhelmed by the heroine Maria's charm.

As for why, it's because just a few days after school started, with her out of control charm, she's already attracted Jared's interest, and captured Keith's heart as well.

"Come to think of it, just earlier, I met a girl who has the power of light magic."

Jared was saying such a thing while he was drinking tea with Keith and me in the dorm's common room. Jared had invited me over by saying he had some rare candies for me today, and I heard this as I was drinking tea with the sweets I had just received, and I nearly spit out the tea I was drinking.

Somehow, I managed to swallow it without spitting it out, I was really close to staining the tablecloth in front of me with tea with the prince right in front of me. That was close..... And just as I was feeling relieved at avoiding an incident, Keith showed interest in Jared's topic of conversation.

"Ahh, that commoner girl's a really hot topic of conversation now."

"That's right. When I was walking around on the school grounds just now, I met her by coincidence."

He met her while he was walking around on the school grounds..... It's the first encounter event between Jared and the heroine!

The heroine who's curious by nature, was exploring the school grounds, but since the campus is too big, she got lost. And so, when the heroine

had no more idea where she was anymore, she decided to climb a tree to look around, even though she was wearing a skirt at the time. At that time, the blonde-haired, blue-eyed prince, Jared, just happened to come by.

The heroine blushed crimson red at being discovered like this by Jared. And so, Jared got interested in the tomboyish heroine that was climbing a tree in a skirt, and helped her find her way back to the dorms.

.....Jared's story was just like the game's scenario, I started getting depressed at hearing it.

Ahh, so it'll just be like the game..... Jared's already starting to take interest in the heroine after this encounter..... And then, he'll surely fall in love before long.....

"Mmm. So there are other girls out there that climb trees in skirts just like nee-san."

"This is the first time I've seen someone other than Katarina climb a tree in a skirt. Well, since I'm used to Katarina, I didn't think anything of it, but she seemed really embarrassed."

".....Mmm, that's right. Normally, you'd be pretty embarrassed if someone saw you climbing a tree in a skirt..... Most people won't say proudly 'since I'm a professional at climbing trees, it's fine.....'"

"Well, Katarina is out of the ordinary. But, that's what makes her so special. Hey, Katarina, are you listening?"

Ahh, and so Jared's fallen in love with the heroine, he only got engaged to me reluctantly in the first place as a defensive measure against other noble girls, and I'm going to be a nuisance now..... I'll..... be a nuisance.....

"Oi, Katarina, are you listening? .....It's no good. She's not listening at all."

".....It seems that way."

Ahh, this is the worst..... It's only been a few days since school started, and my destruction is approaching me already.....

And so, I was so shaken, and completely lost in my own little world, that I forgot to check with the person in question, Jared, about how far along they've progressed in their love.....

"Hey, it's already time for us to return to our rooms." I just kept worrying endlessly until I was finally prompted by Jared and Keith that it was time to go.

And so..... Somehow, the two of them seem to have noticed that something's off about me –

"Nee-san. After all, since this isn't our home anymore, it's not good if you pick up and eat something strange, you know."

"That's right, Katarina. You're already 15 now, you really should stop picking up and eating anything that you see."

It seems that they've misunderstood it to be that I've "gotten carried away and eaten something unidentified." Well, that's because it's happened many times before.....

But, I have a complaint..... I'm not just "picking up" things to eat! I'm "harvesting" from plants and trees! Even I definitely won't eat things off the ground, so I'm not "picking up" things to eat! Besides, I've done this more than ten times already, and I only upset my stomach twice.....

"Oh, I also met that girl with light magic that Prince Jared was talking about just now."

Just a few days after Jared gave me such a shock, this time it was my stepbrother Keith that made such a comment.

This time it was after I had gotten ready in the morning, with Keith coming to pick me up since he wanted to go to school together, so there was no danger of me spitting out any tea this time. But.....

“.....What!!”

A mysterious utterance was heard.

“.....Hey, nee-san, what’s the matter?”

My stepbrother flinched at my sudden mysterious cry, and pressed me for the cause.

“C, could it be, you were hitting on her!?”

In the game’s first encounter event between Keith and the heroine, he was hitting on her.

After all, in the game, Keith was a real playboy, and would hit on any girl that he saw, anyways, he was a real dangerous fellow. For that reason, when he saw the rumored girl with light magic by coincidence, he got interested in the heroine because of her uniqueness, and started hitting on her.

“.....W, what does hitting on her mean...?”

“.....Uhh~, hitting on her means, how to explain it..... Mmm. It means to invite girls with immoral thoughts in mind.”

“Inviting girls with immoral thoughts in mind..... There’s no way I would do such a thing!”

Keith was shouting with a bright red face. Well, certainly I can’t imagine Keith doing something like hitting on her. In the game, Keith was a trashy playboy, but thanks to me deigning to give him an education on the matter, he became a wonderful gentleman instead. Well, although he has become a ladies’ man without him realizing it.....

Keith was desperately denying it while blushing, so I pressed him with “then, what were you doing with her?”

“She just happened to be walking in front of me, and I picked up a handkerchief that she dropped.....”

“Handkerchief.....”

That’s right! In the game, Keith got interested in the heroine during their first meeting, and was promptly rejected when he hit on her. And because the heroine rejected him, he got even more interested in her. And so, after the heroine rejected Keith and left, she’ll drop her handkerchief.

After discovering it, on the next day Keith will appear in front of the heroine again and force her with “is this yours? If you happen to want it back, go out on a date with me first.”

“.....And, what happened to that handkerchief?”

I’m scared, I’m scared, what’s the answer.....

“What do you mean what happened to the handkerchief, I picked it up and gave it back to her.”

“Oh, oh, is that what happened.”

Ahh, so Keith didn’t keep the handkerchief.....

Then, it seems that he probably won’t be forcing the heroine to go out with him using the handkerchief as an excuse..... However..... I can’t repeat the same mistake I made with Jared, I need to make absolutely certain to check all the details this time.

“.....And, after you met the girl with the power of light magic, what..... What did you think of her?”

“.....What I thought of her? She seems like a normal, nice girl. She thanked me really politely.....”

Keith answered me like he didn’t really understand what I was getting at.....

Ahh, that’s not it! Keith. That’s not what I really want to hear! I’m going to have to be super direct with him!

“What I’m saying is! What do you think of Maria-san! Did you fall in love with her beauty!?”

I raised my voice loudly and grabbed on to Keith’s shoulders, and Keith became completely wide-eyed.

“!? ..... Fall in love with her..... Nee-san, what exactly do you mean.....”

Ahh, the surprised look that he has right now is just like the way he was when he first joined our Claes family..... I must have nailed it! There’s no mistake! Keith’s already fallen for Maria!

“.....Like I thought, you’ve already fallen in love with Maria-san, eh.....”

“.....Uh, nee-san. Really, what are you saying.....?”

I gripped Keith’s shoulders even more tightly.

“Listen up, it’s okay. Don’t hide things from me, aren’t we siblings after all! It’s just that, I want to tell you one thing..... I definitely won’t interfere between Keith and anyone that Keith likes! I’ll definitely be cheering for you and Maria-san! I definitely won’t do something like get in the way!”

I’ll never get in the way of your love! I’ll be your ally! So, even if I do something wrong, please don’t eliminate your nee-san!

In order to take in my deep words, Keith was looking at the sky..... For some reason, Keith had a look on his face as if he had lost something very important..... I’m also concerned that he seems to be looking worse off than earlier as well.

“.....Keith?”

While I was looking at Keith blankly, I heard Anne speak up from behind me.



“Ojou-sama, if you go any further than this..... I’m afraid Keith has already reached his limit.”

Limit..... That’s it! After hearing Anne’s words, I finally came to the realization that I had been unconsciously shaking Keith rather violently.

Since I shook him so hard right after he ate breakfast, it’s probably making him feel a little sick. I did something really terrible to him while being unconscious of it.

“I’m really sorry, Keith. I shook you so hard right after you ate breakfast, if you’re feeling a bit sick now, how about you take a break from classes and go rest in the infirmary?”

I apologized, and came up with the idea to have him rest, but..... Without looking like he got any better, Keith just replied “I’m fine.”

“.....But, if you’re not feeling well.....”

“.....No, it’s not that I’m feeling sick..... My body is fine, but..... The problem is with my spirit.....”

For some reason, Keith kept grumbling about some stuff I didn’t really understand and saying that his body was fine, and refused to go to the infirmary. And so, we joined up with Mary and Sophia, and even on the way to classes his complexion didn’t improve at all. I really forgot myself in the moment there, and shook him too hard. Keith, I’m really sorry about what I did to you.

And so, I kept worrying about Keith throughout classes, but during the next break in between classes, he seems to have returned to his usual self

—

“I think I originally underestimated how absurdly dense the enemy was..... From now on, I’m going to attack even more directly.”

While holding my hand, he declared something completely irrelevant to the situation for some reason.

But, really, since it's me, I'm fine, but..... For real, he's so popular..... He's holding a girl's hand like that and looking straight into my face without any reason at all, what a dangerous child he is. At this rate, all the pure girls will be going crazy about him.....

Since he's finally returned back to his normal self, I'll allow it this time, but I'm going to have to warn him as his older sister next time that he does something like this to me.

But anyways, the heroine Maria's charm is really quite something..... In just a few days, she's already attracted Jared's interest, and Keith's completely fallen in love with her. It's really as expected.

Once again, it looks like I'm going to have to come up with a good strategy.

And so, that night, I conducted a strategy meeting once again alone in my dorm room.

Well then, this session of the Katarina Claes destruction end avoidance strategy shall now commence. I think I'll even subtitle it with "the heroine's charm is really amazing~."

Chairman Katarina Claes.

Representative Katarina Claes.

Secretary Katarina Claes.

"Alright everyone, let's come up with some good ideas!"

"Hai~."

“Okay. Well then, please go ahead, Katarina Claes-san.”

“It’s already in the subtitles, but..... The heroine Maria-san’s charm is more than I expected! She’s already got Jared’s attention, and Keith’s fallen for her!”

“So it would seem. As expected of the heroine-san.”

“But, I don’t think Jared should be in love with her yet?”

“Uhh, what do you think you’re talking about? Jared’s already interested in her. Falling in love with her is only a question of time now.”

“Really? Well, for sure, Jared was like that in the game, Jared actually seems fine to me now, he’s interested in various thing, he always gives me advice on my field, and he’ll always bring lots of different types of sweets!”

“.....Well, it’s just as you say. But, this isn’t the first time that he’s been interested in a special person! I mean, Jared’s always going on about Katarina, he never talks about anything else but the name of the girl he’s currently interested in!”

“That’s right, if we go along those lines, now that he’s interested in the heroine-san for the first time, it’s only a matter of time before he falls in love.”

“Honestly, the heroine-san is so amazing.”

“At this rate, Alan and Nico will be falling in love with Maria-san soon as well for sure.”

“.....So it would seem.....”

“.....Is that really the case?”

“Eh!? What do you mean?”

“Indeed, the heroine Maria-san is just like in the game, she’s great at academics and powerful at magic, and as a bonus she’s also an amazing beauty……. But in that case, Mary and Sophia won’t lose to her either!”

“!?”

“The two of them, as Alan and Nico’s rival characters, are really smart as well, and also have powerful magic, and won’t lose to Maria-san in beauty either! There’s no way that Maria-san can beat them so easily!”

“That’s right! They’re both really charming as well, so they definitely won’t lose so easily!”

“I agree, there’s no way they’ll lose that easily! The only one that will lose, is Katarina who’s bad at both academics and magic!”

“I agree, it’s only Katarina that loses. If that’s the case, I’m really relieved.”

“I agree, I’m really glad.”

“……………Oi, wait just a little bit, we shouldn’t be so glad!! If Katarina loses, won’t all be for naught!! We’ll head straight for our destruction end!!”

“Oh, that’s right! If Katarina loses, everything will come to an end!”

“……Certainly, it’ll all come to nothing if we lose, but……. Everyone, think. Let’s consider this calmly. Against a girl who’s smart and powerful at magic, do you think a girl with a villainess face that’s bad at academics and magic can possibly win?”

“…………”

“…………”

“…………L, let’s make a field! We just read ‘More on Agriculture’ and ‘The Importance of Experience in Agriculture’ recently. Even if we’re here at school, we can’t afford to slack off from working on a field!”

“That’s right! We also need to practice throwing the toy snake more, so that we can throw it as naturally as possible when the time for it comes!”

“After that, we just need to get the okay from the teachers, and we need to continue practicing the sword as well!”

“That’s right!”

“Well then, tomorrow let’s ask the school to allow us to make a field, practice throwing the toy snake even more, and keep practicing swordsmanship, does this sound good to everyone?”

“Hai~~~.”

And so, the Katarina Claes destruction end avoidance strategy meeting was concluded. I didn’t really come up with anything new.....

“In the morning, I’m going to ask the teachers to allow me to create a field here.”

And so, I went to sleep in my bed that was slightly smaller than the one I had at home.

A few days later, after my classes ended, I was digging in a corner of the school grounds where almost nobody would ever come.

“Ojou-sama, is this a flower garden?”

Anne was asking me with a dubious look on her face.

“Yeah, it’s a flower garden. Since you and Keith keep telling me that I’m absolutely forbidden from making a field, I figured I might as well plant a flower garden instead.”

That's how it is. Even though I was all pumped up to create a field here at school, Keith and Anne kept insisting that "even if you do it in your own home, you can't do it at school" and strongly opposed me, so I compromised with them by saying I'd do a flower garden instead, and I've talked with the school already about it as well.

Gardening seems to be surprisingly common as a hobby among nobles, so it was quite easy to get permission.

That's why, I'm making a flower garden right now.

However, Anne kept looking at me more and more dubiously.

"But ojou-sama, the seeds you have there don't look like flower seeds to me....."

"Anne really, what are you saying now. These are proper flowers too. These are cucumber flowers, and these eggplant flowers will bloom as well."

".....Ojou-sama..... So what you're saying is that I didn't see things wrong, and these are vegetable seeds....."

"Well yes, they're vegetable seeds in the end, but..... Before being vegetables, they're also flowers that will bloom as well!"

As I puffed out my chest in pride, Anne just sighed deeply as she looked at me.

"I thought I had convinced you already....."

"And so, I've already ordered the other seeds as well, it's fine, right?"

As I said so, Anne just kept staring at me, and sighed deeply once again.

".....I understand. However, please try not to let the other students or the school find out about it."

"Thank you!"

Yay~! Anne was persuaded! If I can persuade Keith as well later, nobody else should be complaining at me about it.

“.....But anyways, ojou-sama, I feel like that hoe you’re using and those work clothes you’re in right now look really familiar for some reason.....”

“Ahh, these? Of course they’d look familiar. After all, they’re the same ones I’ve always been using at home.”

After I said so, Anne’s face became terribly haggard.

“.....Just as I thought..... But, ojou-sama, if memory serves me right, we definitely left those work clothes and the hoe behind at the Claes mansion.....”

“That’s so! Even though I took the trouble to pack them away so neatly in my luggage, you took everything out again! Since I had no other way, I asked Tom-san to deliver them himself all the way from our house to me!”

“.....Tom-san, that traitor, it couldn’t be.....”

After grumbling so to herself, Anne became quiet and just kept watching me work, and I made good progress working with the hoe. It’s a lot smaller in size compared to the one at home, and since I have classes as well now, I don’t have that much time anymore to work on a field, so I’ll have to work my hardest.

After that, although I got a bit of a scolding, I was somehow successful in persuading Keith as well.

By the way, my friends all found out about the field immediately.

While watching me plow the field, Alan held his belly again and exploded in laughter saying “unbelievable, to come to school to do something like this,” and Jared seemed to have his head down and shoulders trembling again while standing next to Alan.

Mary, Nico, and Sophia were all really shocked at first, but all said that they would help me if I needed it.

There's still two years left until the otome game ends, and in order to overcome all the destruction flags, I'll be staking my life on plowing my field.

## **24 – I begged for sweets**

Several weeks have passed since I enrolled in magic school. The other day, just like in the game scenario, there was a test to determine all the students' aptitude in academics and magic.

And so – Keith, Jared, Alan, Mary, and Sophia – my friends and stepbrother almost completely monopolized the top spots in the end. As expected of my friends and stepbrother.

Also, being up there amongst my high-spec friends, the game's heroine Maria was obviously there as well. As a commoner girl rather than a noble, she shouldn't have been receiving specialized tutoring like we have, and probably just received a regular education from the local neighborhood school. Even so, being able to snag a top spot away from all the other nobles, it's as expected of the heroine.

By the way, as for my ranking..... Cheers for being average! I worked hard and I want to be praised!

Come to think of it, the ranking order went just like the game scenario, with Jared in first, Maria in second, and Alan in third, but..... If it's just like the game, Alan shouldn't be able to accept the fact that Maria's higher ranked than he is, but.....

“Oh, I'm not really concerned about winning or losing. Everyone has things that they're suited to and unsuited to after all, there's no reason to



worry about each and every little thing, it's unavoidable." Alan said so with an expression as if he didn't care at all, and there was no sign that he would run off to go contact Maria, either.

Just like this, while some things were just like the game, some things were different from the game as well.

Such as, the selection of student council members.

The student council is supposed to be an organization for the just cause of "helping the students improve school life and be more fulfilled through self-governance," created at the same time as the school. Well, their actual activities are more like, helping teachers with classes, or taking care of trouble between students..... It's more like odd jobs only, but.....

This student council was just like the one at my school in the previous life, candidates were not elected, but chosen instead.

The top ranking students from this test are forcibly appointed to the student council.

I'm saying forced, but I don't think it's a pitiful thing at all.....

.....Since being chosen to be on the student council is evidence of the student's excellence, it's a very prestigious honor, so just about everyone will agree to serve on the student council. Also, the people that are chosen will become admired by all the students.

And so, since my friends and stepbrother monopolized all the highest ranks, all of them became student council members along with the heroine Maria.

Really, it's exactly like the game.

Well, if you want to find and pick out something that's different from the game, it's that my friends and stepbrother kept saying "it would be great if we could be together with Katarina (sama)" as well, apparently troubling the teachers a bit.

Since everyone's entered the student council, and I'll be left all alone, since they're all such nice people they were probably considering my feelings. By the way, my maid Anne mostly just supports my life in the dorms, and isn't with me while I'm at the school campus. Well, after classes, she'll always follow me closely saying "I don't know what ojousama might get up to if she's by herself" whenever I go to work on the field.

That my friends are all so concerned about me, I'm really happy about it, and of course I love being together with everyone, but I don't dislike being by myself, relaxing and kicking back once in a while as well, so there's no problems either way.

That's how I viewed things, but.....

Before I realized it, I had gotten permission to visit the student council room that was basically supposed to be for members only, and it could even be said that I was half forcibly invited there. Well, it seems that my friends and stepbrother pulled some strings, but.....

.....Even when I asked, I couldn't get the specific details out of anyone, so the truth is still shrouded in mystery.....

And so, without knowing how it became so, I started bothering them in the student council room from time to time.....

"Please have some, Katarina-san."

"T, thank you very much."

The person who was saying so while holding out some tea for me, was the top-ranked second-year student, who became the student council president. He's also a handsome boy that won't be outdone by all the other members, and he has brilliant red hair with grey eyes, and is as cute as a puppy.

By the way, the vice-president is the “devilish earl,” Nico.

The student council members are supposed to be chosen on the basis of their academic and magic abilities, but..... Looking at the people here, it makes me wonder if they’re not being chosen by their looks instead.....

But, in comparison to the seven first-years that were picked for the student council, there were only two second-years, the president, and the vice-president Nico.

According to the president’s story, last year there was seven of them chosen as well but, apparently because of Nico, this and that happened, and everyone else stopped coming to the student council. Since the president is also a handsome boy, he’s probably somewhat Nico-resistant.....

The charm of the “devilish earl,” is really frightening.....

Well, at least this time, a bunch of first-years that are Nico-resistant have entered the broken apart student council..... The president seems to be really happy at such a thing.

Probably because of that, even though I’m unrelated to the student council and always being dragged here by my friends, he’s never shown me a displeased face at how frequent I visit, and would always welcome me politely and bring out tea for me.

And so, thanks to the incredible welcoming I always got, I’ve already gotten completely used to being around the student council. Well, it’s all because of my nice friends that were concerned about me, but.....

And so, since I’ve gotten so involved, it would be great if I could get along well with the other members of the student council apart from my friends.....

“Claes-sama, if you would like, please try these as well.”

While I was sipping on the president's tea, I involuntarily jumped when the beauty in front of me recommended some sweets to me.

"T, thank you, Campbell-san."

I thanked her courteously, and the beauty, Maria Campbell, broke out into a wide grin.

.....That's how it is. Since I'd gotten so involved with the student council, I now have a point of contact with the heroine Maria-chan as well, and whenever I would come to the student council room, she would always kindly recommend some sweets for me with a smile on her face.

And so, I've only known the Maria-chan from the game up to now, but.....

Maria Campbell..... Her true form was – a really kind, nice girl. She's also good at everything, who is a wonderful ojou-sama that will do anything without complaint. And, even though she can do anything, she has a really humble attitude without being proud at all.

Man, she's really such a wonderful and charming lady.

I was even getting confused at why the game's Katarina would view her as a mortal enemy and bully such a nice girl so much.....

For sure, my capture target friends are also gradually getting attracted to Maria-chan's charm.

While I was vaguely thinking along those lines, I tossed the sweets I received into my mouth. Nn!? These sweets are quite delicious.

"These sweets, are really delicious."

I told Maria-chan this reply about the sweets that she had given me.

“Yes, they’re quite delicious, aren’t they. It’s something that the students donated to the student council.”

Ahh, so it was a donation.

Indeed, since the students here admire the student council, there seems to be quite a few donations as well. Moreover, since there’s many high ranked nobles among the students, the donated sweets are all really high class.

Ah, come to think of it, speaking of sweets –

“Campbell-san, can you make sweets by any chance?”

In the game, Maria’s hobby was making sweets. And so, she also donated her own handmade sweets to the student council quite often. The handmade sweets had a plain yet delicious taste different from the luxurious sweets that the capture targets were used to eating, and she should have been able to capture their hearts through their stomachs like that.

The illustrations of her handmade sweets looked really yummy, in the previous world I wanted to eat them so much that I instinctively ran all the way to the convenience store to buy some sweets that looked similar.

And now, I really want to see Maria’s actual real handmade sweets instead of looking at them on a screen..... I want to be able to taste the real thing right now! And so, my question completely had an ulterior motive to it, but.....

“.....Yeah.”

Maria-chan had completely frozen up. Somehow maybe she took it as a threat like “make sweets for me!?” I hurriedly tried to find an excuse to defend myself with.

“Ah, no, uh. I’m not really trying to force you to do anything unreasonable.....”

“.....Uh, why is it that you happen to know that I make sweets?”

Ah, so that was it. Indeed, Maria-chan's never said publicly that “I make sweets.” Even in the game, she should have started out by secretly borrowing a corner of the kitchen and only made a little bit for herself to taste only. I think that if you raise a capture target's love rating enough, then this subject will come up, and he'll say “then, make some for me too, won't you?” .....But, judging based on Maria-chan's reaction just now, she probably hasn't told anyone about it yet.

Mmm~. There's no way I can say “I saw you making them in the game,” so.....

“Uhhh~, it, it's, I heard something from the lady in the cafeteria.....”

“.....Is that how it is.”

Even though I became quite flustered in trying to come up with an excuse, it seems that Maria-chan's accepted it. I'm rather relieved.

“.....Just as Claes-sama has heard already, certainly, I've been borrowing the cafeteria kitchen to make some sweets for myself from time to time, but..... It's, still very far from the extent where I can show everyone.....”

While staring at the luxurious sweets on the table, it seems that Maria-chan had a troubled face. For sure, there were only luxurious sweets purchased in high-class shops to be seen here, with no amateur or handmade sweets. As for the reason, it's because in this world, most of the nobles, even the women, didn't cook at all. Basically, cooking was considered the work of servants.

As for me as well, I can't make anything at all, including sweets. In the first place, in the Claes family, I was prohibited from entering the kitchen completely.

Right after I recovered my memories, I pinched various ingredients several times, licked some mysterious spices, and I thought I'd try to cook some mushrooms that were growing in the garden, but..... Soon

after, I was banned from the kitchen, being told “the kitchen is a dangerous place with knives and fire, and it’ll become a big incident if the ojou-sama is injured here.” It’s really hard being such a sheltered ojou-sama.

Well, in short, most noble girls don’t cook for themselves, and all the sweets donated to the student council were made by professional cooks instead.

That’s why Maria-chan would find it difficult to bring out her handmade sweets that would be considered the work of an amateur.....

“As for me, even though I like the luxury sweets made by cooks, I also love handmade sweets.”

“Eh, Claes-sama also happens to eat handmade sweets?”

Maria-chan had a very surprised expression on her face.

“Yeah. The head maid in our house, also has a similar hobby, and I always asked her for sweets.”

The sweets sold in shops that are made by professional cooks look very elaborate and are quite delicious, but the head maid’s sweets also have a simply plain yet delicious taste to them as well. Since I haven’t been able to eat them anymore since coming to school, I’ve been very sad.

“After coming to school, I’ve missed the taste of that handmade candy. If it’s not too much trouble for Campbell-san, I’ll be really happy if you could share just a little bit of what you make with me, and I’ll even help supply you with funds for the supplies, and properly pay you for what you make.”

Somehow, I want to be able to taste those sweets that look so amazingly delicious – I desperately tried to make the best smile I could with this villainous face of mine. Will seeing how desperate I am really work –

“I couldn’t possibly accept any money! After all, I’m just using the leftovers from the school kitchen! .....Since it’s really just an

amateurish hobby of mine, I'm not sure if they'll taste good to Claes-sama, but..... I'll make some soon and bring them to share."

Is what Maria-chan said.

"Thank you!"

And so, just as I wished, I managed to successfully secure a promise from Maria-chan to bring some of her handmade sweets for me to try.

After class the day after I secured Maria-chan's promise to bring me handmade sweets, I headed to the dorms in order to change into my work clothes for the field, and was walking by myself on the road to the dormitory. By the way, my stepbrother and friends are gathered in the student council room right now for work, but.....

Today, I wanted to use the fertilizer that I just received from Tom-san as soon as possible, before my friends see me doing something like this and try to break it off by pulling me away.

And so, while I was walking on the dorm path..... "Growl~~" my stomach began grumbling loudly. Since today I forgot my homework for my class at noon, I was scolded by Keith and had to write an apology, and I wasn't able to eat enough lunch because of that. Usually before I headed out to work in the field, Anne would prepare something to eat for me. While I was thinking that – my sense of smell that I'm proud to say is like a dog's, caught a very delicious smell in the air.

And so, I became all aflutter involuntarily and was hooked by the smell, and followed it towards the forest that was a bit off the road –

Maria-chan and a few girls that were probably students of this school were there.



They were positioned almost as if to surround Maria-chan, and from their sparkling dresses, I guessed that the girls were probably high nobility.

And so, the delicious smell seemed to be coming from a basket that Maria-chan was carrying covered with a handkerchief..... This delicious smell was permeating the air in the area.

What's going on here! Could that possibly be, the handmade sweets that I had requested!? Even though she had just promised me yesterday, she's already made them!? What a nice girl she is!

I was so thankful that I immediately ran up to Maria-chan and the others who didn't notice me at all..... That's when it happened.

"Thump!!" A loud sound echoed in the forest. One of the girls surrounding Maria-chan swung her hand wildly, and knocked over the basket Maria-chan was holding onto the ground.

And so, what fell out of the basket was probably the sweets that Maria-chan made herself, some sweets that looked like muffins came rolling out.

"Just because you have the power of light magic, you're being fawned over by everyone, doesn't that feel just great! A commoner bringing something as poor as this for the student council to eat, have some shame and know your place!"

The girl was saying so as the basket laid on the ground, and now it looks like she's about to start stomping all over the sweets!? Wait a minute now, don't do such a thing to my sweets~~!!

"Stop!"

I got between the girl and Maria-chan and shouted.

".....K, Katarina Claes-sama....."

Right now, all the girls surrounding Maria-chan were wide-eyed at my sudden appearance, and of course this included the girl that was about to stomp on the sweets.

“What exactly do you all think you’re doing!?”

What do you think you’re doing to the sweets that Maria-chan went to the trouble of making for me! I glared at the girls.

“.....Eek!”

The girls all instantly turned pale. After all, this is a villainous face! It’ll double the strength of any glaring!

The crime of ruining my sweets, unforgivable!

I maxed out the power of my gaze, and increased the sharpness of my glare on the girls.

I guess they were affected by my anger and the girls –

“We’re very sorry!!”

And with pale faces and heads down, they raced each other madly in a manner unbecoming of ladies to dash away – no, to run away.

.....Mmm. Today, my villainous face is in perfect condition.

But anyways..... I turned towards the handmade sweets Maria-chan made that were lying on the ground. Because the ground here was mostly grass, there seems to be very little dirt on them.

I picked up the basket first, then started putting the fallen sweets back inside.

Then, like usual, the smell started stimulating my stomach’s hunger again..... I couldn’t hold back anymore and finally reached for a sweet myself.

And so, I snapped up the whole thing into my mouth.

“.....Delicious.”

This is, the best taste among all the sweets that I have ever eaten! This is too delicious! What is this mellow taste, and it's not even that sweet, it's unbelievable how perfectly controlled the sweetness is. And so, at how delicious the sweets were, I lost myself in a dream – and before I realized it, I'd already finished eating all of the sweets in the basket that I'd picked up.

And then “ahh, I'm full, I'm full,” and I looked up – and I saw Maria-chan staring at me in shock.

.....Oh no, I've done it now! I've finally gotten so carried away that I ate all of Maria-chan's sweets~! Since there were so many, they were probably for everyone in the student council to share.....

.....Or perhaps I should say, I had thought they were all meant for me, so I ate them all..... In the first place, it might not have been meant for me..... This is bad!

“Uh, uhh, I got really carried away and ate all of them..... I'm really sorry!”

I lowered my head to Maria-chan in a big panic. Then Maria-chan started talking in a rather hesitant manner.

“Ah, it's okay. I don't mind that, but..... Uh, but it's something that's fallen on the ground.....”

Ahh, I see, so it's about that. She didn't say, “but it wasn't even something made for you,” I'm really happy~.

“Since they fell on the grass, it's no problem at all since they barely got any dirt on them.”

If you pick them up immediately, it should be safe by the three-second rule as well. As I said so, I puffed out my chest in pride.

“.....Is, is that so.”

Maria-chan laughed as if she was somewhat troubled.

But anyways –

“Campbell-san is really really good at making sweets. That was very delicious.”

Yep, the deliciousness of Maria-chan’s handmade sweets far exceeded my expectations. That mellow taste in my mouth, that exquisite sweetness, her workmanship isn’t inferior to a professional cook’s in any way at all. When I told Maria-chan my passionate feelings –

“.....Thank you very much.”

She laughed bashfully with her cheeks turning slightly red.

While my heart was beating involuntarily in excitement at her cuteness – Prince Jared came from the direction of the school campus.

It seems that, today was a student council meeting, but since Maria-chan who never missed a meeting didn’t show up, they got worried and were searching for her.

I was squatting on the ground while holding a basket, and Maria-chan was standing still with red cheeks, Jared seemed to be looking at us rather dubiously..... Maria-chan made a white lie for me by saying “by coincidence, I met Katarina-sama here, and we had a little chat.” Thank you for not telling him “Katarina-sama ate all the sweets that were meant for everyone.” If that had been exposed, I would have faced the anger of Jared and Keith, with them saying “how could you eat someone else’s sweets!”

And so, since Jared found Maria-chan safely without incident, they went back together to the student council room. For some reason, I was almost dragged there along with them as well, but since I really wanted to sprinkle the fertilizer in my field today, I courteously refused.

And so, with my stomach filled, I changed into my work clothes, and headed for the field.

But anyways, to think that Maria-chan was being bullied like that..... While I was working in the field, I thought about what happened earlier.

Even though she's a commoner, she has the special light magic, and her grades are excellent. By the way, her face and personality are great as well. On top of that, she got chosen to be a member of the student council that all the students admire.

Maria-chan is the envy of the entire school..... The proud nobles must be very jealous of her. That's why, people like that who pick fights will appear.

In the first place, in the game it was mostly Katarina that was doing that to the heroine, but..... That's not the case now. But even so, this school is filled with high nobility, so for example, even if Katarina doesn't take the lead in bullying the heroine, a second, or even third Katarina will appear to take that role.

But anyways, to treat the sweets that Maria-chan went to the trouble of making for me like that, they're such bad kids. Just a little more and I wouldn't have been able to eat anything.

Man, I'm not like the game's Katarina anymore! High pride and mean intentions –

.....The game's Katarina.....

Come to think of it, I feel like in the game, there was a scene where Katarina was harassing the heroine just like what happened to Maria-chan today.....

When Maria-chan was bringing some sweets that she had made for everyone in the student council, on her way towards the student council

room, she was intercepted and her sweets were thrown onto the ground, and then stomped all over.

At this time, the capture target Jared appeared in the nick of time in a gallant manner, and magnificently fought off the villainess Katarina and her comrades.

And so, he picked up some of the sweets that fell onto the ground and tasted them, then flashed a grin at Maria-chan and said "it's delicious."

Man, it was different from the usual Jared, his gentle smile at that time was almost as if it could transmit his emotions from across the screen.

I see, so what happened today, was that event..... Since I wasn't the villainous Katarina, I hadn't realized.

If I think of it like this, that explains why Jared appeared as well. After all, it was supposed to be Jared's event. I see, so it was Jared's event –  
.....So does that mean, I just stole Jared's event away from him!?

I mean, originally, Jared was supposed to stop Katarina there, and before Jared could chase the girls off today I scared them all off with my villainous face..... On top of that, before Jared could show off such a nice smile, I had already eaten all the sweets.....

Ahh~, I'm really sorry, Jared. I've stolen a love event from an important friend of mine..... If it's like this, Maria-chan and Jared won't be able to fall in love. I'm really, really sorry.....

.....Huh? Wouldn't it be better if they didn't fall in love?

I mean, if Jared and Maria-chan fall in love, then Katarina won't be needed anymore and will fall straight to a destruction end.....

That means, I've done really well! Go me! Without realizing it, I've gotten further off the path to destruction, wonderful!

Alright~! Then, I'll work hard and keep going just like this!

And so with renewed resolve, I began sprinkling the fertilizer that Tom-san had sent me.

However, I got too carried away.....

After that, I had to listen to Anne's scolding, and my work clothes were confiscated for a day.

## **25 – I stole an event again**

It's been a few weeks since the incident where I stole Jared's event.

Somehow, it feels that I've been getting along better with Maria-chan ever since that incident.

After that, Maria-chan would often make sweets for my sake.

"Please have some, Claes-sama."

She would always offer the best, most delicious sweets with a smile on her face, and so I found my feet naturally taking me to the student council room all the time.

And so, I would get to have Maria-chan's handmade sweets and the president's tea he brewed himself, and I spent every day in such luxury that all the other students would surely curse me in jealousy if only they knew.

Not only are Maria-chan's handmade sweets unbelievably delicious, the president is also unbelievably good at brewing tea for a noble. The president's tea had a very gentle taste to it.

By the way, the president seems to be distantly related to Nico, and they've apparently known each other since childhood. That explains why he was Nico-resistant.

And so, I'm now getting along really well with the other members of the student council that didn't start out as my friends, but other than in the student council room, I still don't have a point of contact with anyone.

There's no avoiding it for the student council president since he's in a different grade, but Maria's in the same grade as me, and I'd really love to get along better with her outside of the student council room..... Somehow, there's still some distance between us outside of the student council room.

Well, basically, all of us are considered members of the country's upper echelons, but..... It's not just Maria-chan, most of the other students don't have such a high social status either, so they're not approaching us.....

In the game as well, at first Maria wasn't so close with the capture targets outside of the student council either. As the game progressed, and the capture targets' love ratings went up, the capture targets will finally be able to get closer to Maria, and she'll finally spend time with them outside of the student council.

However, right now it seems that none of the capture targets are trying to approach Maria. Everyone has a normal, friendly relationship with her, but it feels like nobody's gone crazy in love for her. Rather, at this point in time, since I've been completely enthralled by Maria-chan's sweets, I might be the one with the highest love rating towards Maria-chan right now.



So that's how it is, nobody's going all lovey-dovey over Maria-chan.....

And right now, outside of the student council room, Maria-chan is still mostly by herself..... It seems that, other nobles are taking it upon themselves to bully her like Katarina would have.....

I'm going to have to do something about it.

While that's what I thought, I didn't really have any good ideas on how to do it, so I consulted my wise stepbrother –

He said that things would get better if she just stuck with us more often.

After all, we are basically considered to be this country's upper echelons. If she's with us, no matter how high the other nobles' ranks are, they won't be able to move against us easily, is what my stepbrother said.

When I was panicking in the student council room because I forgot my homework yet again, it was Maria-chan who loaned me her easy to understand notes, and politely helped explain the problems I didn't understand to me. Even though I always say "make and bring some more sweets over!" Maria-chan would always have a smile and bring more delicious sweets over.

Before I realized it, I've become quite fond of the girl that should have been Katarina's mortal enemy, the heroine Maria Campbell.

That's why, I can't turn a blind eye to the situation she's in.

Alright! I'm not going to wait for the capture targets anymore since they're being so slow! I'm going to hurry up and get closer to Maria-chan, to be able to hang out with her even outside of the student council!

A few days after I steeled my resolve.

I had decided that for lunch break today “let’s invite Maria-chan to have lunch with me!” and was looking for Maria-chan.

By the way, me and my friends always ate in the school cafeteria together, but I’ve never seen Maria-chan there.

If I recall correctly from the game, the setting was that she would be nervous since many high-ranking nobles used the cafeteria, so instead she would always make her own lunchbox in her dorms and eat it by herself.

Based on such information, I started searching for likely spaces where she would be eating – at the edge of the school garden, I found Maria-chan on a tiny bench.

However, Maria-chan wasn’t by herself. Just like what happened a few weeks ago, some girls were surrounding her. There was still quite a bit of distance between us, but the wind carried their voices over to me.

“Even though you’re just a no-good commoner, just because you have some light magic, and you got chosen to be on the student council, aren’t you getting too carried away!?”

“Just because you have light magic you get all this special treatment, and it’s really sad that the student council has no way but to put up with you!”

“That’s right! It’s probably that you got favorable treatment during the test anyways just because your magic is special!”

The girls surrounding Maria-chan were showering her with an unending torrent of verbal abuse.

And so, while everyone was busy yelling at Maria-chan, one girl amongst them slowly raised her hands. There was a red flame flickering on her hands.

That's fire magic!!

That girl over there was trying to injure Maria-chan with fire magic.

And so, I ran as fast as I could to close the gap between me and the girl with the flame in her hand. At this rate, Maria-chan will be in danger! But, I was too far away to stop her.....

If it's like this.....

"Come out! Earth Thud!"

With my shout, a clump of earth about ten centimeters wide appeared in front of the girl who was approaching Maria-chan. And so, that girl stepped on the clump of earth and splendidly tripped, falling onto her butt.

Alright!! I made a victory pose in my mind. Do you see the results of my long years of training now, the power of my Earth Thud!?

And so, while the other girls were being distracted by the girl that fell on her butt, I rushed to Maria-chan's side, and stood between her and the other girls. And then, I glared at the girls with my villainous face.

"Exactly what are you all doing!! In the first place, saying that there was favoritism during the test just because she has light magic, don't accuse people without evidence! This school is a meritocracy with no place for favoritism!"

If there really had been favoritism, as the daughter of the Claes family, I should have gotten higher than just average grades.

"And what's more, I know just how hard Maria-chan is working! Her test scores are the result of hard work!"

That's how it is. While in the game the heroine had seemed to be an invincible genius, the actual Maria-chan is a really hard worker.

She'll always show me her notes when I forget my homework, she'll also bring a mountain of textbooks along in order to teach me, I was able to see just how hard-working Maria-chan was every day.

Maria-chan's not a genius, just an exceptionally hard worker.

"What's more, everyone in the student council, as well as me, we're not together with Maria-chan just because she has light magic! Because she's a hard worker, because she tries her best at everything, because we like her, that's why we're together!"

I glared at the girls with my villainous face, and smiled evilly as I thought a villainess would.

"If you guys keep doing things like this – you'll reach a destruction end!"

Just like the villainess Katarina Claes in the game~

And so, I think it was because of fear caused by my magnificently villainous face, everyone scattered again in an unladylike manner, dashing madly to get away.

Sigh, they're all so gutless. Such insignificant creatures, they're no match for the likes of this villainess, Katarina Claes-sama!

And so, my villainous face played a great role again, and chased the girls off, and when I turned back to look at Maria-chan –

For some reason..... Isn't she crying a stream of tears!?

"M, Maria-chan!?"

I hurriedly got close to Maria-chan and placed my hand on her trembling back.

Being surrounded and shouted at like that, almost having some dreadful magic used on her..... She must have been really scared. I rubbed her back gently. After rubbing her back for a while..... Maria-chan suddenly muttered something.

“.....Uh, Claes-sama..... My name.....”

Huh, name? What’s this about? I thought about it for a while, and then realized.

.....Ah, come to think of it, I accidentally called her “Maria-chan” just now, the nickname I’ve always secretly had for her in my heart. But I’ve always been calling her “Campbell-san” up until now –

“Uh, uhh, I’m sorry. I called you something that you’re not used to so suddenly.....”

Maria-chan shook her head at the panicked me.

“No, I don’t mind at all. In fact, you don’t need to add ‘-chan’ either. Please just call me Maria.”

How Maria-chan looked was so ridiculously cute when she said that, so by reflex, I smiled in satisfaction, and tried calling her that immediately.

“Thank you, Maria.”

Somehow, it feels that the distance between us has finally shrunk even more.

And then, Maria smiled happily with her cheeks turning red –

“Uh, well..... If, if it’s alright with you.....”

For some reason, she seemed to be behaving a little suspiciously. I wondered what it could be and just stared at her.

“Uh, would it be alright if I called you ‘Katarina-sama’ just like everyone else in the student council does?”

She was saying it almost as if she was making an important confession. My blank look immediately became –

“Of course, it’s fine to call me whatever you want. After all, we’re already friends, aren’t we?”

a smile as I said so. For some reason, Maria's tears that had stopped earlier were pouring out again, and I desperately tried to stop their flow.

After a little while, Maria finally calmed down, and Keith came looking for me since I still hadn't shown up to the cafeteria, and the three of us returned to the cafeteria together, and had lunch with the rest of our friends in a hurry. Maria shared a little bit of her handmade lunchbox with me as well, and it was just as delicious as the sweets she made.

And so, because I forcefully resolved this incident, I was finally able to spend time with Maria together outside of school.

But anyways, to think that I would use magic in that way in order to deal with those bullies..... When the day became evening and ended, I laid on my bed trembling. If I hadn't been able to stop that girl at that time, if she used that fire magic on Maria..... If Maria had been injured.....

It's a crime to attack other people with magic. If such a thing had actually happened, it would just be like what happened to the game's Katarina, and she would have been exiled from the country as punishment for her crime.

.....Come to think of it, Katarina also did something similar, didn't she.

For some reason, I was really concerned about it, so I got off my bed and pulled out my "Previous life's game memories" notes.

One day during lunch break, Katarina and her lackeys cornered Maria like usual. And so, while everyone was surrounding Maria and yelling at her, one of the lackeys decided to hurt Maria with some fire magic.

At this critical moment, Maria suddenly became airborne. Maria had been picked up and protected by an earth golem that was much larger than any person.

It was the magic from Keith Claes, who just coincidentally happened to be nearby.

Then, Keith used the earth golem to carry Maria off to safety.

By the way, Keith didn't appear in front of everyone himself, and only used his earth golem, since the ringleader of the bullies was his own stepsister Katarina, he felt like it would be too much trouble if he showed up before everyone.

And so, after being helped out, Maria was still trembling in fear in front of Keith because of getting attacked by fire magic, so Keith comforted Maria by gently hugging her.

At this time, even though Keith was supposed to be a playboy, he looked a little uncomfortable at doing this, it was a very moe scene.

.....That means.....

I stole another event away again!?

What's more, this time from Keith!?

Such a thing..... Even though I had promised with all my heart to not interfere with Keith's love, I stole his all-important event..... My stepbrother..... I'm really sorry.

.....At this rate, Maria-chan and Keith's love might not progress. What have I done..... I'm so sorry..... Wait, huh? Maybe if it's for the better if they don't fall in love?

I mean, if Keith and Maria-chan fall in love, Katarina might be eliminated and meet a destruction end.....

That means, I've done really well! I'm so amazing!

Right after stealing the event from Jared, without realizing it, I've gotten further off the path to destruction again, wonderful! How brilliant I am!

And so I kept congratulating myself over and over again, and went to sleep in an excellent mood.

This time, there's great merit in having gotten closer to the heroine of the game. It's that it's become easier to see how far along everyone's love is progressing.

After all, after becoming good friends we're always together. Since we're both girls, talking together about stuff like "hey~. Who do you like?" has become a very simple thing.

However..... Things didn't go as well as I hoped.

That's because when I asked Maria "hey~. Who do you like?" she would reply with.....

"I look up to and admire Katarina-sama" and her cheeks were flushed red as she said so.

I'm very happy about that, but..... That's not what I mean by who you like..... By the way, when I asked my best friends Mary and Sophia the same question I asked Maria –

"Me too! I also look up to and admire Katarina-sama! More than anyone else!"

"Maria-sama, Mary-sama, how unfair! Me, me too! Katarina-sama!"

is what they said. They're really lovely, wonderful friends, but..... My friends..... I wanted to hear about your love stories.....

And so, it always got sidetracked from love stories, and for some reason would always become a competition to praise me. I'm very honored and happy about that, but.....

In the end, time was wasted without being able to confirm the progress of love with the capture targets.....



However, after becoming closer with Maria, I was able to feel even more how powerful her charm was.

For example, her perfect sweets that were almost as if they were created exactly to my liking. Her kindness in making easy to understand notes just for me. And from time to time, when our eyes met, a really cute smile would appear almost as if she was embarrassed.

Man, if only I was a boy, I'd be completely captured already by now.

For example, after having stolen one or two events accidentally, I kept being in contact with Maria's overflowing charm that nobody could resist. If this had been any of the capture targets, they would probably be head over heels in love already.

And so, after becoming better friends with Maria-chan, and sensing the danger of her charm, I decided to –

“So what I'm saying is, how did it feel just now? Did it seem natural?”

At my question, Anne furrowed her brows.

“.....Uh, ojou-sama, what's this? Exactly what is it supposed to be?”

“What you say, of course I'm practicing throwing my toy snake as naturally as possible!”

Man, really now Anne, even though I had already explained things clearly to her, I repeated what I said earlier.

“.....That's right. I did hear about this from you earlier, and I see what you're trying to do, but..... To begin with, I have no idea why.”

“What I'm saying is, just in case of emergency, it's practice so I can surprise my opponent and create an opening!”

“.....Ojou-sama..... This 'just in case of emergency' part I don't understand even one bit.”

“Just in case of emergency means just in case of emergency! Alright then, once again, watch to see if my throw seems natural or not, okay?”

As I said so, I started practicing throwing the toy snake from my pocket again.

“To begin with..... I don’t think the action of throwing a toy snake from your pocket seems natural.....”

Anne was sighing something under her breath, but it didn’t reach me as I was desperately practicing my throwing movements.

And so, in order for me not to be forced into a destruction end by a capture target that falls in love with Maria’s overwhelming charm, I’m desperately going to practice throwing the toy snake with all my might!

I’m also going to expand the field a little, and add more crops!

## **26 – They call me a special girl**

Maria Campbell is my name. But, very few people actually call me that. Everyone calls me “the special girl with light magic.”

I grew up in a small border town far away from the capital, and my light magic first activated when I was five.

A friend that I was playing with tripped and fell, and injured her foot. It was bleeding, and was very painful. While thinking that I’d try and do something to help her, I touched her wound. Suddenly, a dazzling light burst out from my hands, and when it came in contact with her wounds, they disappeared instantly.

My light magic had healed her, curing all the injuries and pain.

However, at that time, I didn't know what I had just done. If I had been born to a noble family, I would have had knowledge of magic to some extent, but..... I was born in a commoner's family. At that time, I hadn't even been to school yet, and I didn't even know what magic was.....

Also, my friend that I healed with magic knew nothing, just like me. A light just suddenly burst out from my hand. What's more, all the injuries disappeared just like that after being enveloped in the light.

My friend was astonished at what happened, and was terrified. She screamed, pushed me, and ran away.

While I just froze there in confusion, my mother who was worried about me, came to find me, and found me there frozen to the spot.

After that, I was finally able to tell my mother about what happened, and she immediately brought me to city hall.

And so, after I was inspected by the government, I was recognized as a "light magician."

Until I activated my latent magic abilities, I was just another ordinary kid. Even though my family's not very rich, I'm very fortunate to be able to live with my energetic and reliable father, and my kind mother that loves to make sweets. If you really try to say that there's something special, it's that my mother is called the most beautiful woman in town, and since I looked so much like her, of course my father and everyone else in town loved me.

But..... After I became a user of "light magic," everything changed.

In this country, those with magic powers are mostly nobles, and there's almost no commoners with magic power. Nevertheless, I was born as someone with an extremely rare magic. However, almost all people born with such a magic would have a noble for a parent.

Because of that, when I was found out to have magic..... People started suspecting my mother of having an affair. It was probably also partly because I looked a lot like my mother, but not very much like father.

Especially since mother was the most beautiful woman in town..... People were saying that she must have hooked up with a noble at some point in time.

Of course, nothing of the sort happened, but.....

Rumors spread very quick in a small town, and our family relationship became rocky.....

Before long, my father who had always come back home immediately after work to listen to mother and I happily, would hardly ever come home at all. And so, mother who used to smile all the time would always have a blank expression and have her head down. Even though she also used to like making sweets so much, she wouldn't make any at all anymore.

.....All because I have magic.....

Also, my family wasn't all that changed. Even though all the townsfolk used to treat me so kindly, before I realized it they had all become distant from me, and my friends that had gotten along with me before would no longer play with me.

It was said that I must be the illegitimate child of some noble, since almost no commoner children ever have magic.

I probably wasn't an easy presence to accept for the townsfolk that were used to living a peaceful life.....

And so, since I had light magic – I was shunned by everyone, people were scared of me, and I became a presence to be avoided.

But even so, I..... couldn't help but keep hoping. I want father to return home, I want mother to smile again, and once more, I want to be able to play with my friends.

That's why I worked hard. I actively participated in household chores, never complained or said anything selfish, and desperately studied.

As long as I hung in there, worked hard, and was a good child, I desperately believed that I could return to my original life filled with happiness.....

And, before I realized it, I've become "Maria Campbell, the special girl."

Finally, I was chosen to be the school representative at our neighborhood school, and the teacher praised me for being a wonderful student.

But even so..... As usual, father wouldn't come home..... And mother wouldn't even look me in the eye anymore.

And, as for the other children, nobody would play with me anymore. They all ignored me, and while I wasn't bullied, nobody would play with me.

And no matter how hard I worked, I was still called a "special girl," and nothing changed.

In fact, contrary to my wishes, people would say behind my back "since she's a noble's illegitimate daughter, someone must have pulled some strings for her" or "she must have cheated by using magic."

What can I do to get along with everyone like we used to..... is what I was always thinking about. Then, one day, a classmate of mine brought some of her handmade sweets to school to share with everyone, and I saw how happy they all were at eating them.

If I could successfully make handmade sweets just like how she can, I wonder if I'll be able to get along better with everyone..... Before my magic activated, I used to often make sweets with my mother. The sweets I made with my mother were very delicious.

That day, after coming home, I started making sweets by myself for the first time while remembering what my mother taught me. The sweets I made weren't as good as the ones I made together with my mom, but they had a very nostalgic taste, and gave me a warm and fluffy feeling inside my chest.

And so, I tried my best at making sweets, and when they were finally good enough, I took them with me to school.

Then, just like my classmate did last time, during lunch break, I put some sweets on everyone's table.

However..... Nobody touched those sweets at all. When lunch break finished, and everyone returned to their seats, I collected all the sweets and put them back in my bag.

After class, when everyone left and I was alone in the classroom, I took all the sweets out of my bag again. Even though they're supposed to be sweets that everyone can enjoy energetically..... I couldn't stop the tears from coming out.

And so, I ate all the sweets on my own, then returned home and immediately laid down on my bed.

I told mother from across the bedroom door that "I won't need dinner tonight" in a business-like voice saying that "I'm full today" and all she said was "oh okay" before she left me alone.

My teachers, everyone in my school, all the townspeople, and my family, everyone calls me a "special girl."

That "special" also meant "different."

No matter how hard I worked, no matter how hard I worked, I'm still being shunned by everyone, an existence to be afraid of.....

I don't want to be called a "special girl with light magic!"

I'm not some illegitimate child of a noble..... I didn't cheat with my magic..... I only worked so hard..... I just want to be recognized by everyone that I'm a hard worker.....

Nobody would even look at me. Not even my mother would look me in the eye.

Anyone is fine..... Anyone is fine, so, someone..... Look at me..... Only look at Maria Campbell.....

When a person reaches fifteen, it's mandated by law that people with magic power have to attend magic school.

Magic school..... If I go there, everyone will have magic – there, maybe I can be a normal girl again.....

If I go there..... just maybe, someone will appear who will be my friend.....

Curled up alone on the bed in my dark room, that was the hope that sprung from my chest.....

I'm sure that if I go to magic school –

And so, when I entered magic school, my long years of hopes for magic school were immediately shattered.

All the students at magic school were nobles, and I was the only commoner, there couldn't be any greater difference between us.

Also, since commoners didn't really have that much awareness about magic to begin with due to not having magic powers, we only thought that "light magic" was something rare, but it turns out that it's the rarest of rare even amongst magic users.

As a result, I've become even more "different" from the others, and had no way of making any friends. What's more, I was also bullied for the audacity of having magic powers despite only being a commoner.

So, it didn't change at all from the time in the town, in fact my days became even harder.

Even so..... If I keep working hard..... If I'm a good girl..... I'll keep working as hard as I can.

And so, a few weeks after I entered magic school, there was a test to determine the students' aptitude in academics and magic. Since I studied as hard as I could, I managed to get good grades on both tests.

And so, as a result, I became a member of the student council.

The other members selected with me were all people of such high social status, that ordinarily I would never have even gotten the chance to ever speak to them had I still been living in town with a normal life. The second-year senpais in student council were the same as well.

Amongst all of them, my first self-introduction was quite weak as I shrunk in their presence, but the student council members were unconcerned with social status, and were friendly and wonderful people.

In particular, because the other student council members wanted it to happen, a person who was not a student council member was allowed to come and go as she pleased here, the duke's daughter, Katarina Claes-sama – she would even treat me exactly the same as she treated all the other nobles, in a warm and friendly manner.



In the school, only the student council room became a place where I could rest and relax.

“Campbell-san, can you make sweets by any chance?”

Katarina-sama suddenly asked a question like that, after classes in the student council room. At the unexpected question, by reflex, I froze up.

“.....Uh, why is it that you happen to know that I make sweets?”

Well, for sure, I had always continued making sweets since that time. Eating a sweet made with my mother’s recipe would remind me of fun times with my mother, and would make me feel slightly better.

Since coming to this school, there’s been bullying and hardships, so I’ve been borrowing a corner of the kitchen to make sweets for myself. However, that was supposed to be a secret. Of course, I’ve never said anything about this topic in the student council room. Despite this, why is it that Katarina-sama knows about this? In confusion, I was staring at Katarina-sama.

“Uhhh~, it, it’s, I heard something from the lady in the cafeteria.....”

That was the answer I got.

Indeed, since I haven’t asked the cooks to keep it a secret for me or anything, maybe such a topic has become a rumor already.

“.....Just as Claes-sama has heard already, certainly, I’ve been borrowing the cafeteria kitchen to make some sweets for myself from time to time, but..... It’s, still very far from the extent where I can show everyone.....”

I stared at the luxurious sweets placed on the table.

They’re high-class sweets that I’ve never even seen the likes of before..... To people that are eating such wonderful things, I can’t possibly bring out my cheap handmade sweets..... Then, to the downcast me, she said –

“As for me, even though I like the luxury sweets made by cooks, I also love handmade sweets.”

Is what Katarina-sama said.

“Eh, Claes-sama also happens to eat handmade sweets?”

I was very surprised. I’ve heard that most nobles don’t cook for themselves. Because of that, they would only eat sweets made by professional cooks, and not something handmade by an amateur, is what I thought.

“Yeah. The head maid in our house, also has a similar hobby, and I always asked her for sweets. After coming to school, I’ve missed the taste of that handmade candy. If it’s not too much trouble for Campbell-san, I’ll be really happy if you could share just a little bit of what you make with me, and I’ll even help supply you with funds for the supplies, and properly pay you for what you make.”

As she said so, Katarina-sama directed a lovely smile at me.

“I couldn’t possibly accept any money! After all, I’m just using the leftovers from the school kitchen! .....Since it’s really just an amateurish hobby of mine, I’m not sure if they’ll taste good to Claes-sama, but..... I’ll make some soon and bring them to share.”

Being pressured by that lovely smile, even though I know I’m not worthy, I agreed and made her a promise. Then, to me –

“Thank you!”

Once again, Katarina-sama smiled at me gently.

Maybe, Katarina-sama might just happen to be taking pity on me. She heard rumors that the commoner girl was making sweets by herself in the kitchen, and eating them by herself..... She might have said that out

of sympathy for me. Katarina-sama is a very nice and wonderful person, after all.....

She might only be taking pity on me, it might only be lip service.....

But..... It's the first time..... That someone's said they want to eat my sweets.....

I was on cloud nine, and after returning to the dormitory, I immediately went to the kitchen at night to make some sweets. The day has finally come where I'm making sweets for someone else, I won't have to cry while eating sweets by myself anymore.

The next day after classes ended, I was on my way to the student council room, after fetching and heating up the sweets that I had left in the kitchen. I wanted Katarina-sama to enjoy it even a little bit. And so, I placed the warmed sweets into a basket, and headed for the student council room.

While on my way – that's when it happened.

On the path from the dorms to the school, several female students called out to me. From their expensive-looking, sparkly dresses, I knew that they were fairly high-ranked nobles.

"There's something we need to say to you."

Is what they said, and I was forcibly brought over to the forest. When we got to the forest, the girls started showering me with verbal abuse, calling me "commoner peasant" and the like.

This has happened to me several times since I've entered school, I just remained silent and waited for the girls' anger to subside a bit. Then.....

"What's this?"

One of the girls showed interest in the basket I was carrying.

".....Th, that's..... Sweets that I made for everyone in the student council....."

At the unexpected question, I answered it honestly by reflex..... And then, I regretted my carelessness immediately.

At my answer, the expressions on the girls visibly changed. I felt an anger from the girls whose faces were turning in red in anger that could not be compared with earlier. I've done it now..... My careless remarks have made them really angry.

Then –

One of the girls knocked the basket out of my hand, and it fell onto the ground with a loud “thump!” From the basket, the sweets started rolling out onto the ground.

“Just because you have the power of light magic, you're being fawned over by everyone, doesn't that feel just great! A commoner bringing something as poor as this for the student council to eat, have some shame and know your place!”

The girl that was shouting at me right now raised her foot and was about to stomp on the sweets.

I've never enraged anyone like this before, and so in front of their fierce anger, I could only blankly watch what was going on before me..... At that time –

“Stop!”

Suddenly, a dignified voice echoed. With beautiful flowing tawny hair, clear light blue eyes, that voice and dignified pose –

Why would she be in a place like this, after classes are over she should always be in the student council room.....

And so, almost as if to protect me, that person was standing in front of me.

“.....K, Katarina Claes-sama.....”

The girl that was about to stomp on the sweets mumbled with a blank look on her face.

I was very surprised, but the girls surrounding me seemed to be even more surprised. They were all staring while frozen stiff.

“What exactly do you all think you’re doing!?”

And so, when Katarina-sama raised a stern voice at them, they immediately turned pale.

Well, that’s to be expected. Katarina-sama, the daughter of Duke Claes, is not only the fiancée of the third prince of this country, Prince Jared, she’s also a person that’s very, very treasured by the members of the student council, and she also has many secret admirers due to her cheerful personality.

Due to that, if you displease Katarina-sama, it’s not just the school, it’s not unthinkable that there might not even be a place left for you in the entire country.

And so, almost as if it was a lie, the girls who had such a menacing atmosphere just earlier became obedient and –

“We’re very sorry!!”

They all lowered their heads to Katarina-sama and..... Almost as if it was a competition to get first place, they ran away with some amazing momentum.

Since the events happened too suddenly for me, I stood there blankly while stunned for a while, but..... Come to think of it, I just remembered that I was on my way to the student council room.

I had promised to bring my sweets to the student council..... Then, I just realized that I no longer had any more sweets to bring.

All the sweets that I had made were lying on the ground. Ahh, there’s no way I can bring these to the student council now.....

I remembered that day again. Nobody ate the sweets I made, all my handmade sweets were left on their desks in such a lonely fashion..... It was useless no matter how hard I worked or how well I made them..... Nobody will eat them.....

While I was standing still, Katarina-sama was picking up the fallen sweets and putting them into the basket for me.

And then, I panicked when I realized what was happening. Katarina-sama wasn't doing anything like picking them up to put them back in the basket for me..... And, when I tried to speak up.....

Katarina-sama was snapping up the sweets she picked up off the ground into her mouth. Then –

“.....Delicious.”

As she said so, she was smiling.

Sweets that had been on the ground.....

I was thinking that, just like that day, I would have to take care of them by myself, but –

Katarina-sama was smiling while saying it tasted delicious.

.....It was too much of a shock for me, so I opened my eyes wide and just stared at Katarina-sama.

And so, after finishing all the sweets, Katarina-sama raised her face. Her clear light blue eyes met mine. Then –

“Uh, uhh, I got really carried away and ate all of them..... I'm really sorry!”

She suddenly lowered her head towards me. For some reason, she was apologizing about “eating” all of them.

“Ah, it's okay. I don't mind that, but..... Uh, but it's something that's fallen on the ground.....”

To the confused me, Katarina-sama responded with a strangely proud face.

“Since they fell on the grass, it’s no problem at all since they barely got any dirt on them.”

She said so with such conviction, that I couldn’t find anything to say back and just returned a troubled smile to her.

“.....Is, is that so.”

And so, even though I’ve never dreamed it could happen, Katarina-sama praised my sweets. It’s the first time that I’ve ever been praised like this, I was really happy and embarrassed, and my face became hot.

And then, from the direction of the school campus, Prince Jared, a member of the student council, arrived. Since I still hadn’t come to the student council meeting, he came looking for me.

Katarina-sama was holding my basket while squatting on the ground, and I was standing still with red cheeks, and to Prince Jared who was looking at us dubiously I told him “by coincidence, I met Katarina-sama here, and we had a little chat” as an explanation.

I don’t want unnecessary worrying about me if he found out that I was being bullied. And, paying attention to my feelings, Katarina-sama also agreed with my story.

Even while returning with Prince Jared to the student council room, the heat from my face still wouldn’t subside –

“That’s, you better be careful since there’s a dreadful harem.”

Prince Jared smiled profoundly as he said so..... I don’t really understand what he’s talking about.

From then on, I would bring handmade sweets to the student council on almost a daily basis, and Katarina-sama was always overjoyed every time.

Since Katarina-sama had protected me, the bullying had let down quite a bit as well, then it happened when I had completely let my guard down.

It happened during lunch break on a certain day.

Since a lot of nobles use it every day, the school cafeteria is a very large and grand structure. And so, many of the school's students, all nobles, would eat their lunch here.

The school dorms were separated by social status, so the class separation carried over to the school cafeteria. While I'm a commoner, I'm still allowed to use the cafeteria normally, but..... Since there's only one school cafeteria, many high-ranking nobles with great power used it as well.

Because of that, I would be embarrassed to use it as a commoner, so I couldn't use it at all, and I would always make my own lunchbox in the dorm, and eat by myself somewhere in the garden.

And so, on the day, just like usual, on a small bench on the outskirts of the school garden, I was about to open up my lunchbox.

At that moment. Before I realized it, I got surrounded by some girls I'd never met before.

"Even though you're just a no-good commoner, just because you have some light magic, and you got chosen to be on the student council, aren't you getting too carried away!?"

"Just because you have light magic you get all this special treatment, and it's really sad that the student council has no way but to put up with you!"



“That’s right! It’s probably that you got favorable treatment during the test anyways just because your magic is special!

As they surrounded me, they rained an unending torrent of verbal abuse on me. I kept silent like usual, and just waited for their anger to subside.

Their words..... Since coming here..... No, it’s what I’ve heard all my life.....

“Because you have light magic.”

Ever since that day I activated my magic powers, those words had always, always been with me.

No matter how hard I myself worked..... People would always say that everything is because “I have light magic.....”

If it’s possible to wish for, if it’s possible for me to have a romance with someone, even I want to be held happily by someone too.....

Even though I don’t need such a thing..... I just.....

While I was being shouted at by everyone and thinking of those things, that’s when it happened.

Slowly, one of the girls was raising her hands. There was a red flame flickering on her hands.

Up to now, I’ve been slapped on the face countlessly, and even been bullied by people stepping on me..... This is the first time that someone’s used magic like this on me.....

As if the bright red flame wasn’t real, I just stared at it blankly like I was in another world altogether.

And so, when that girl with the flame began approaching me, that’s when it happened.

I think I heard that dignified voice once again, and the girl who was approaching me with the flame tripped and fell on her butt right before me.

And so, before I realized it, that dignified back was once again standing before me.

“Exactly what are you all doing!! In the first place, saying that there was favoritism during the test just because she has light magic, don’t accuse people without evidence! This school is a meritocracy with no place for favoritism! And what’s more, I know just how hard Maria-chan is working! Her test scores are the result of hard work!”

Katarina-sama said so as she stood in front of me just like before as if to protect me.

That’s right, just as Katarina-sama is saying now, I’ve always, always been working hard. I’ve never done something like cheat on a test..... I just desperately worked as hard as I could.....

But, nobody’s ever noticed this before..... I thought nobody ever would..... Even so..... This person, Katarina-sama noticed it.....

I stared at Katarina-sama’s dignified back with my eyes opened wide. And so, while I was still in a daze, Katarina-sama continued.

“What’s more, everyone in the student council, as well as me, we’re not together with Maria-chan just because she has light magic! Because she’s a hard worker, because she tries her best at everything, because we like her, that’s why we’re together!”

At those words, the corners of my eyes became hot, and tears started dripping down my cheeks.....

Ever since that day when I used light magic, everyone started calling me special, and I was treated differently from everyone else.

No matter how hard I worked, the result was always the same, it's an obvious result because of your special power, or you must have cheated, is what people always said.....

Everyone saw me as "the special girl with light magic....." Nobody saw me as a person called Maria Campbell.....

Yet..... Katarina-sama – she noticed how hard I was working..... Not because I'm a girl with light magic, she's saying that she likes Maria Campbell..... She's saying that she wants to be with me.....

It was almost as if a dam had broken inside me, and all the tears that had been pooling up flowed out from me.

Katarina-sama approached me as I kept crying uncontrollably, and rubbed my back gently. The warmth of her gentle hand completely swept away any remaining doubts I had.

".....Uh, Claes-sama..... My name....."

Katarina-sama had always called me "Campbell-san." But, just earlier, she had kept calling me by my first name, "Maria-chan."

"Uh, uhh, I'm sorry. I called you something that you're not used to so suddenly....."

At the way Katarina-sama seemed to be panicking, I shook my head vigorously.

"No, I don't mind at all. In fact, you don't need to add '-chan' either. Please just call me Maria."

As I requested, the gentle Katarina-sama called me so with a smile.

"Thank you, Maria."

At hearing my name being called in such a dignified voice, I summoned my courage.

“Uh, well..... If, if it’s alright with you..... Uh, would it be alright if I called you ‘Katarina-sama’ just like everyone else in the student council does?”

When I gave it everything I had and confessed my wish to her, Katarina-sama had a blank look for a moment, and then –

“Of course, it’s fine to call me whatever you want. After all, we’re already friends, aren’t we?”

and was smiling gently as she said so.

She’s saying that she’ll be friends with me, a commoner, even though our social statuses are so far apart..... My tears that had just begun settling down started to flood out again.

Anyone is fine..... Anyone is fine, so, someone..... Look at me..... Only look at Maria Campbell..... That’s always been my wish.....

I worked even harder..... I entered magic school..... My long-held dream was shattered into pieces..... I thought that my wish might not come true anymore.....

While Katarina-sama’s warm hand patted my back, my tears kept flowing. I was so happy at having my long-awaited dream come true –

After a while, when my tears calmed down again, Keith-sama came to pick up Katarina-sama, and the three of us headed to the cafeteria together.

I held out my hand to Katarina-sama, and seeing how my face turned red involuntarily, Keith-sama said “unbelievable, it happened again, exactly how many people are going to enter this harem.....” and was talking to himself under his breath in stupefaction. I wonder what on earth he’s talking about.

From then on, even outside of the student council, I got a lot closer to Katarina-sama and her friends. Today as well, we received our homework together, and were heading for the student council room.

And so, Katarina-sama was very pleased at the sweets I had made for the student council. I was so happy as well that involuntarily, I diverted my eyes a little in embarrassment.

However, when I looked around me, all the other members of the student council were also looking at Katarina-sama with loving eyes, and were laughing happily as well.

Of course this included Prince Jared, and even Nico who usually didn't change his expression at all.

And so, I checked out all the members of the student council..... Huh?  
.....

Somehow, I had an ominous feeling, and looked at that person again.

Then, that person smiled softly just like usual.

.....Was it just my imagination.....

For a moment, I felt like that person had a very cold look when I looked at them.....

But, when I looked at that person again, they had a very gentle expression like usual once again.

So, I decided that I must have made a mistake.

I mean, that person is always so kind, for that person to have such a cold expression..... To be glaring at Katarina-sama..... It's impossible.....

"Maria, these sweets are so delicious!"

While I was wondering why I had been thinking such strange things, Katarina-sama began talking to me with a big smile on her face.

Once again, I became so happy that all those thoughts disappeared from my mind.

In order to see this smile again tomorrow, I'm going to improve my skills and make even better sweets!

Ten years after I got the power of light magic, after working hard – I was finally able to realize my dream of spending my days happily.

### **Side story 3 – Noble wives' tea party**

For me, Miri Diana Claes, the biggest headache in my life, my daughter Katarina, went to magic school this spring and my home finally became very peaceful. The vertical lines being engraved on my forehead between my eyebrows were also beginning to disappear.

When I sent my problem child off to school, I didn't give her any warnings in particular, well, even that daughter of mine would probably mature a little at school, is what I thought.

And so, when that daughter of mine returned for summer break, just like always, she put on work clothes, started working in the field, desperately practiced tossing a mysterious toy, and kept doing things I don't understand..... Well, since it seems like she hasn't gotten into any trouble at school, I'll just turn a blind eye to her strange actions at home.

However, that's what I thought, but..... I was really too naive..... From the bottom of my heart, I was reminded.....

Noble wives would gather once a month on a fixed date for a meeting. Today was the scheduled day for our monthly tea party. Since many high-ranked noble women gather here, a lot of them have children in magic school, and just now all the children have returned for summer break. Therefore, it was natural that the topic of conversation would be about the children and magic school.

I listened to the other ladies telling stories about school that they had heard from their children, and shared some that I had heard from mine as well. And so, among the stories..... I heard this rumor.

"I heard this from my daughter, for some reason, it seems that there's a rumor that someone's making a field at magic school!"

"Er, something like a field..... You mean, a field like a farmer's?"

"That's how it seems. What's more, it's said that it's one of the school's students that's making it."

"Wow..."

Next to the other women that all had looks of surprise – I desperately hid how shaken I was inside, and pretended to be just as surprised as they were.

"But, the students there are mostly high-ranking nobles, I don't think such a person would be there....."

"It's as you say. I'm sure that someone spread such a story as a joke or something."

"That must be it."

"But anyways, it's really such a funny story."

In accordance with the other ladies that were laughing, I smiled as well and said "that's right." But in reality, cold sweat was running down my back.....

There's only noble children attending school there, there shouldn't be anyone there that would make a field..... The person in question that's the butt of everyone's joke has to be.....

However..... Right now, there's a field that's invading the Claes family garden bit by bit..... And my daughter that works in the field so happily with a hoe.....

Thinking something like she'd mature a little if she went to school..... I was too naive, and made a huge mistake.....

You'd better prepare yourself for when I return home.....

I clenched my fist as hard as I could under the table.

## **27 - Mother and daughter**

It's now the first summer since I've enrolled in magic school. It's not as long as the summer vacation at school in my previous life, but this magic school has summer vacation as well. And so, during summer vacation, most of the students will be returning home instead of staying in the dorms.

As for me, Katarina Claes is no exception, I'm also returning to our family mansion.

And so, at home, I kept practicing my anti-destruction countermeasures. I had the gardener Tom-san help me improve the toy snake so that it would be easier to throw, I read some more books on agriculture, and I've become an expert in working on my field. However.....

"After all, I really want to see the real thing~"

When I said that, Keith who was next to me looked at me strangely.

".....What on earth is it this time?"



“A field! I want to see an actual field!”

“.....Field? A real thing, isn't there one here already?”

Keith was pointing at the field that was slowly beginning to invade the Claes family garden, and was looking at me even more dubiously. I protested “no, that's not it!”

“I'm not talking about a field like the one I'm making here as a hobby in this garden, I want to see a real, gigantic field that was created by a farmer!”

“.....What?”

“Of course! Just in case, if I have to become a splendid farmer!”

As I puffed out my chest proudly, Keith was shaking his head while holding it.

“.....Man, I don't even know how to comment on this.....”

I kept insisting to Keith who seemed helpless for some reason that I wanted to see “a real farmer's field,” and was able to get his permission.

And so, a few days after I got his permission, with Keith accompanying me, we went to observe some farmers' fields while remaining incognito. The reason being, if we didn't go incognito and a duke's daughter suddenly wanted to visit some farmers' fields, the farmers would all be really shocked and mother would get angry – that's what we took into consideration.

And so, in order for people to not find out I'm a duke's daughter, I dressed myself like a merchant's daughter would, and headed out to get a look at the farmers' fields that I had wanted to see for so long.

“As expected, a real farmer’s field is the best~~ the size and magnitude are on a completely different level~~”

After finishing my tour, I was in a really good mood, and I was enjoying the scenery outside the horse-drawn carriage that we had borrowed from a merchant despite the bumpy ride. At first, all there was to see was only a huge field, but gradually, I was able to see some buildings in the distance.

“W, what’s that?”

“Ahh, that’s the town.”

Keith who was also looking outside the window told me the answer.

“So there’s a town in a place like this, eh.”

Since I had been too excited about getting the chance to see a field in person, I hadn’t been paying attention.

“That’s right. If I recall correctly, it’s the town where Maria Campbell-san grew up in.”

“!?”

It can’t be, this just happened to be the town where Maria grew up..... Indeed, although I had heard that it was a small border town, I never expected it to be this one right here.

Is that so~ So this is the town Maria grew up in~ Hmm, come to think of it.....

“Could it be that, Maria’s also here right now? I think that she said she’ll be returning home for summer vacation as well?”

“Come to think of it, I think she did say that..... You couldn’t be!?”

“I’m going to go look for her!”

“.....As I thought.....”

And so, I managed to forcibly persuade Keith somehow into going to town by saying “it’ll be just for a little bit” even though he kept insisting “it’s bad if you do this because it’ll be a bother.”

Just like I heard from Maria, this border town was quite far from the capital and not a very large town at all.

Because of that..... It’s good that I was spirited..... But I need to think about how to find Maria’s house..... When we asked the people in town we were able to find out immediately.

Just like the town I lived in during my previous life, I got the feeling that it was a town where everyone knew everyone.

And so, Keith and I arrived at Maria’s house unannounced.

“Yes? Who might you guys be?”

The person that appeared at the front door was a beautiful lady. She looked quite similar to Maria, and was probably related to her in some way.

“Um, my name is Katarina Claes, and I’m Maria-san’s friend. Would Maria-san happen to be here?”

I greeted her as energetically as I could, and she seemed very shocked for some reason.

“.....She happens to be out for a bit right now..... I think she should be back soon, but..... If it’s alright with you, would you like to wait here for a bit?”

And so, the lady invited Keith and I into the house.

The Campbell family lives in a very ordinary house, but, it was a very clean and well-kept home.

The lady introduced herself as “Maria’s mother.” Just as I expected, she was related to Maria. But really, she’s such a fragile beauty that even my own mother can’t compare. I’m sure that no matter what, Maria’s mother would never be able to have an ugly daughter.

And then, Maria’s mother brought some sweets and some tea to what was probably their family dining table.

“Are these something that Maria-san made?”

When I saw the sweets and asked that question, her mother had a very surprised look on her face again.

“.....No, it’s something I bought in town. ....Uh, is that child still making sweets?”

“Yep. Maria-san’s really good at making sweets, I’m always asking her to make them for me!”

“.....You’ve had sweets made by that girl before?”

“Yep. They were really delicious!”

When I said so, Maria’s mother lowered her face, and mumbled in a very weak voice “I see.”

And so, a bit later, the door opened, and Maria came home with a shopping bag.

When she saw us sitting there at the dining table, at first, she was really surprised, but.....

“I thought that I wouldn’t be able to see Katarina-sama during summer vacation, but I’m so glad that I got to see you now!”

She was really overjoyed.

And so, we lost ourselves completely chatting without caring about the time, and before we realized it the sun was already setting, and we left Maria's home in a hurry.

Since we were incognito today, we weren't using a horse-drawn carriage from the Claes family, but a merchant's instead, as expected they were hesitant to wait for us in front of a commoner's house, they were waiting for us instead in an open area a bit away from the house.

"I'll send you and the horse carriage off" is what Maria said, and I replied "up to here is fine, really." It's already time to be preparing for dinner, we're alright but Maria really should be beginning her dinner preparations.

"Katarina-sama, Keith-sama, troubling yourselves to come all the way out here today to a place like this, thank you very much."

"Mmm. Us too, suddenly visiting without notification, I'm sorry."

"I'm really sorry about my nee-san that never thinks about anything. The next time we visit, we'll definitely properly contact you beforehand."

After that exchange, Keith pressured me saying "come on, let's go home," then Maria's mother who had remained silent all this time suddenly rushed up to us. Then –

".....Uh, please, I leave my daughter in your care from now on as well."

Maria's mother lowered her head deeply as she said so. The beautiful mother that seemed so much like Maria was lowering her head with a really serious expression.

"Of course, I'll be in her care as well from now on."

I also lowered my head as I said so.

Then, this time, we finally got on the horse-drawn carriage and left in a hurry.

★★★★★★★★★★

In a small border town, far away from the capital, I grew up as the most beautiful woman in town, loved by everyone.

As the years passed, I ended up marrying an energetic and reliable man the same age as me, a guy who was very popular with the ladies by the name of Campbell. Everyone around us blessed our marriage, and a couple of years later I gave birth to a lovely daughter that looked a lot like me. I named my lovely daughter Maria.

I had a wonderful husband and a lovely daughter, I was spending my days filled with happiness.

However, my blissful daily life, came to a sudden end.....

My daughter Maria activated her magic powers.....

“Magic” isn’t technically a rare thing in this country. However, those with magic power were almost all nobles. Since there were almost no commoners with magic power, whenever a commoner child was born with magic power, it would be whispered that it must have been the result of an affair with a noble.

Of course, such a thing never happened. I’ve never betrayed my husband, there’s no mistake that Maria is my husband’s daughter.....

But even so, rumors that I was an adulteress began to spread in our small town. At first, my husband was saying “it’s alright. I trust you,” but, as the rumors kept getting bigger and spreading further..... Before I realized it, he would hardly ever come home.

Everyone in town that had always been so nice to me before, was all keeping their distance from me.

At some point in time, I had become afraid of looking straight at others, and would always walk with my head down.

Even though I had been so fortunate..... Why, how did it come to this.....

If that child..... If only she didn't have magic..... If I never had her.....

Before I realized it, I was shocked at how I was developing a grudge against my own young daughter. My daughter hasn't done anything wrong..... Even though I know that..... But even so, I had to control myself..... I desperately avoided my daughter's eyes as much as I could.

And so, even though my daughter did nothing whatsoever, she found herself in these circumstances, and still completed the housework perfectly, and got excellent grades at school.

Everyone was praising her as special, but behind her back they were calling her an illegitimate child of some noble, or saying that she must have cheated with magic somehow.

Several times as well, people said that they would like to adopt my daughter. If only I nodded in agreement..... I've thought so many times if everything would become much better..... But in the end, I wasn't able to agree to it.

The no-good mother who always averted her eyes from her daughter who was desperately trying to smile with all her might..... Even though I know I'm a foolish mother..... Even so, I'm unable to let go of my daughter.

I've actually already realized it. Just how hard-working my daughter that's being praised as a genius is..... How desperately she's always trying.....

At seeing the way she was..... My resentment was fading..... But..... I continued to avoid her gaze, I was scared of looking straight at my daughter.

If, my daughter doesn't forgive this mother of hers..... I might look into her eyes and see only hatred and disdain.....

And so, in the end, without being able to look my daughter in the eye..... My daughter turned fifteen, and went off to magic school.

Without my daughter there anymore, the house has become very lonely and quiet.

My daughter finally returned to the house again during summer vacation. She had a much brighter expression than when she had left for school.

What exactly could have happened to my daughter in these months.....

A few days later, I found out the cause.

"Yes? Who might you guys be?"

One day during the afternoon, a boy and girl about the same age as my daughter were standing there knocking on my door. Although their clothing was something that merchants' children would often wear, they appeared very dignified.

"Um, my name is Katarina Claes, and I'm Maria-san's friend. Would Maria-san happen to be here?"

The girl with tawny hair was the one who spoke up, and the boy next to her also lowered his head in greeting.

.....Maria's friends..... I was very shocked to hear those words. That's because, ever since she's had magic power, Maria would be ostracized by all the other children..... She didn't have any friends.



“.....She happens to be out for a bit right now..... I think she should be back soon, but..... If it’s alright with you, would you like to wait here for a bit?”

Honestly, they probably have rather high social statuses, and I was wondering if it was alright for them to be here at a house like this, but..... Even so, I definitely wanted to be as hospitable as possible to these people who were calling themselves Maria’s friends.

There’s no way around it because our small house doesn’t have a guest room, so I invited them to our dining table, and they sat down without making any sign of a displeased face at all. And so, I brought out the best tea in the house, and the best sweets I had bought in town. Then –

“Are these something that Maria-san made?”

The girl suddenly asked me this question.

“.....No, it’s something I bought in town. ....Uh, is that child still making sweets?”

“Yep. Maria-san’s really good at making sweets, I’m always asking her to make them for me!”

“.....You’ve had sweets made by that girl before?”

“Yep. They were really delicious!”

The girl was smiling as she said so.

Several years ago, my daughter had desperately practiced making sweets in order to bring them to school, on the day that she did so, she returned with her eyes completely red, and after that, she’s never made sweets even once.....

That daughter of mine that always forces herself to smile before me, holding back her tears inside..... This no-good mother doesn’t have anything that she can give you.....

Finally, you've made some friends that will eat the sweets that you've tried your hardest on.....

A bit later, when Maria returned and saw the visitors, she smiled so happily. It was a blissful smile almost as if she hadn't seen them in many years.

In just a few short months, my daughter's gotten friends and is now able to laugh so happily..... My daughter's changed –

I don't have any excuse to always be like this as well.....

At this rate, with my head always down, without being able to meet eyes with my daughter..... Before long, my daughter might be moving out and leaving me.....

I have to change too –

Dusk approached, and the visitors were leaving, when I suddenly picked up my steps and chased after them. Then –

“.....Uh, please, I leave my daughter in your care from now on as well.”

I lowered my head deeply. Then, the girl smiled and said –

“Of course, I'll be in her care as well from now on.”

She also lowered her head in response.

And then, after watching them disappear from our sights, I looked at my daughter with my eyes wide open. How many years has it been since I looked at her properly –

My daughter's eyes were wet..... Also, my vision was a little blurry as well.....

I didn't see hatred or disdain in my daughter's eyes..... It was surprise..... And happiness that was reflected there.....

It might not be possible to return to the way we used to be all at once..... But even so, as time passes little by little..... If I can get back the daily life from before.....

I walked over to my daughter who was standing still with wet eyes, and hugged her trembling body. My daughter's tiny body..... Before I knew it, has already become the same size as mine.

★★★★★★★★

Unexpectedly, I was able to meet Maria, what's more I was also able to meet Maria's beautiful mother who looked so much like her, I was really happy.

And so, the horse-drawn carriage arrived at the Claes mansion, and I was in such a happy mood that I ran straight into the front entrance. Behind me, Keith was saying "nee-san, if you run into the house wearing those clothes....." which I couldn't hear at all, because I was in a running mood and it didn't reach my ears.

And then, when I passed the front door..... Standing right there like a guardian deva king, was my mother with a villainous face similar to mine, with tight, upturned eyes.

".....Uh, uhh, mother....."

"Welcome back. Katarina."

Mother was smiling as she said so, but her eyes weren't smiling at all. There was clearly a disturbing atmosphere about her.

"You're wearing some very interesting clothes there."

"Uh, uhh, these are....."

I started panicking because I had run inside while still wearing merchant clothes, but.....

“Well, I’ll listen very carefully in detail about your interesting clothes later..... Katarina. Today, when I went to the noble wives’ tea party, I heard a very funny rumor, perhaps you’ve heard of it?”

“.....Funny rumor?”

“That’s right. A very funny rumor. It’s a story about someone creating a field on the venerable grounds of the magic school.”

“.....”

“What’s more, it seems that the person making the field is a student, but would anyone really be making a field at a school where all of the students are nobles only?”

“.....”

“Hey, don’t you think it’s a really funny story? And, when I heard this story, for some reason, even though I couldn’t believe it, only one person came to mind – Katarina, how about we talk a little bit more about this in my room.”

And so, I was dragged into my mother’s room, and couldn’t escape her harsh lecturing for three whole hours, I was banned from sweets, and also banned from working in the field as a really severe punishment.

Well, after this I’ll just get Keith to help me, somehow or other I’m going to successfully complete that flower garden I’m making at school.....

And so, my summer vacation ended.

#### **Side story 4 – Entering magic school**

Born as the daughter of a countryside baron in a border town, this spring, I entered magic school.

Magic school is where people with magic power are gathered once they reach fifteen years of age. I was no exception as I activated my magic powers when I was six, and so I also entered magic school.

However, this school has many high-ranking nobles, as the daughter of a countryside baron, the threshold's a bit too high for me.

If only, my magic was a little stronger, or if I was better at studying, or if I was a special beauty..... If I was a bit more like that person with light magic, Maria Campbell-san..... I'd be able to have a little more self-confidence.....

I have hardly any magic, I can barely keep up in my studies, and people would say that my face is charming, but not that I'm a beauty..... Frankly speaking, I'm not suited for this school.

My parents were very happy sending me off to school because it's the first time that someone's been born with magic in our countryside baron family, but..... After enrolling in school here, as the daughter of a poor countryside baron, I was looked down upon by the higher-ranking nobles, and sometimes they would have me run errands as if I was a servant.

A few months after enrolling in school here, I already wanted to go back home as soon as I could.

However, even to me, a turning point arrived.

It happened when I was secretly reading romance novels that I had brought from home in a corner of the classroom. Higher-ranked nobles would say that these romance novels are for commoners, but, I really loved them, and had always loved them back when I was in the countryside as well, so I secretly brought a bunch of them to school.

"Hey, is that, could that be a romance story?"

When I raised my head at hearing a voice, someone with a really high social status that the daughter of a countryside baron shouldn't be able to speak with was standing there.

Katarina Claes-sama, the daughter of a duke and the fiancée of the third prince, my classmate with the absolute highest social status of them all. Because of that, even though we're classmates, I can't approach her so easily, and we've never even talked once since school started. For such a person to approach me so suddenly, I was so nervous and confused that I completely froze up, and Katarina-sama just smiled gently.

"Actually, I also read romance novels. If it's alright, would you like to chat about them some with me?"

I was invited just like that, and before I realized it, I was having tea with Katarina-sama, chatting with her about the story.

Katarina-sama was extremely easy to get along with, she didn't look down on me like all the other high-ranked nobles, nor did she treat me like a servant for running errands.

Katarina-sama is really such an amazing, wonderful person. As the daughter of a duke, she's also so dignified. Yet, she wasn't proud like all the others about her social status, that wouldn't even see those below themselves. Someone with a lower social status like me, she was nice to me even though I didn't have any redeeming traits at all.

Before I realized it, my heart had completely been stolen away by Katarina-sama.

Sometimes she would play with a puppy in the schoolyard forest, sometimes she would stop and admire the garden flowers. Katarina-sama's appearance was exactly like that of a saint out of a romance novel.

And so, just earlier..... While I was busy admiring Katarina-sama's appearance, I tripped and fell, and because my dress got all dirty, Katarina-sama gave me a handkerchief to clean my dress with.

I refused and said “but I’ll get it dirty,” but she just replied “it’s fine, if it’s okay with you, please use it” and smiled. I clenched the handkerchief to my chest and thought “this will become my treasure.”

Even though I had really wanted to go back home as soon as I possibly could..... Now I want to stay at school longer even if it’s just for a little bit.

I want to spend time by Katarina-sama just a little longer –

★★★★★★

“Eh, nee-san? Where’s that work cloth you always wear around your head?”

“Ahh, that work cloth? Just now, I gave it to a friend from class.”

“EH!? It can’t be, nee-san gave something like that away!?”

“It’s not what you’re thinking, it’s because she tripped and fell and got her dress dirty, so I gave it to her to clean herself with.”

“.....So that was it..... Thank goodness..... Wait a minute, so you didn’t have a handkerchief?”

“Since I wiped my hands on it after finishing my field work, it’s still dirty.”

“.....So that was it..... Hmm? The hem of nee-san’s jacket, isn’t it getting a little frayed?”

“Ahh, this is from that one time, when I was attacked by my natural enemy, a dog, in the school forest. Well, since the enemy that time was small, I was able to defeat it without any problems!”

“.....So that was it..... Well, I’m glad then. But, nee-san..... It’s good to be energetic, but, you should settle down a little bit more at school. Recently, you’ve been picking things to eat from the garden and the trees. This isn’t our home anymore, so you really need to stop being so irresponsible and picking up everything you see to eat.”

“.....It’s not picking up to eat..... I’m harvesting.....”

“.....No, they’re the same..... Stop it already, it’s already so hard to hide things from mother about you..... I’m begging you, settle down a little already.”

“.....I understand.”

And so, I reluctantly nodded as my stepbrother just looked at me and sighed deeply.

### **Side story 5 – Noble wives’ tea party, again**

“Really, Claes-sama’s daughter is so wonderful. The other students call her saint-sama, and it seems that she has many admirers.”

Once a month, we would have a noble wives’ tea party. When I heard another parent telling me this, at first I thought I had misheard something.

But when I asked to make sure, I got the same reply again..... I concluded that she must have gotten confused with someone else.

The reason being, I only have one daughter. And, that daughter of mine is a problem child that always leaves me wondering how on earth I raised her to be like this.

Even though she’s from a noble family, a duke’s daughter on top of that, she climbs trees while still wearing a dress, wears work clothes and



plows a field, and picks up food to eat from the garden, she's really such a no-good helpless daughter.

If it was said that there was a problem such as a monkey at the school, without a doubt, my daughter would be the first thing that comes to mind..... There's no way that a girl being called a saint could be my daughter. However.....

"Uhh, could it be that you've mistaken someone else for my daughter?"

"No, not at all. There's no mistake that it's Katarina Claes-sama. In truth, my daughter is also a member of the Katarina-sama fan club."

".....Er, there's something like a fan club?"

"Yes, it's not an official club or anything, but it's still pretty popular, it seems that there's quite a lot of people in it."

I was too surprised that involuntarily, my mouth just hung open wide agape and I had a blank look as I stood there frozen still.

Unbelievable, there's no way! Why is there a fan club for that no-good daughter of mine! What's so lovely about that monkey daughter of mine!? Maybe, they've gotten her confused with Keith.....

While it's rather regrettable about my actual daughter, I really like my stepson Keith, he's grown up to be such a wonderful and talented son of mine. So I thought they mixed her up with Keith, and got confirmation over and over again, but..... It seems that without a doubt, it's about my daughter, Katarina.

Anyways, the stories I heard from the other ladies about my daughter Katarina, were all stories about a different Katarina than the one I knew.

She likes to admire plants? No, she's certainly good at climbing trees, but it's just to pick fruits off the branches and eat them..... She's liked by animals? No, she's always barked at by dogs, and it seems that she's even chased by them sometimes..... I don't think that she's very liked by them at all.....

I couldn't believe that these stories were about my daughter at all.....

.....Maybe, the no-good helpless daughter that I know is only one facet to her personality, and she's really a splendid saint like what I'm hearing from the stories?

Luckily, my daughter was about to return from school for a short vacation soon. When she returned, I made up my mind to discover the truth.

★★★★★★★★

"Alright~, one, two!"

When I returned from the noble wives' tea party, my daughter had already returned, and was in her work clothes with her face covered in mud, and was chanting something mysterious while working in her field.

At seeing how she appeared..... Indeed, it seems that what I heard at the tea party must have been a mistake.

"She actually might have some splendid and wonderful parts to her if I come out and talk to her a little," such thoughts immediately disappeared from my mind.

"Alright~, one, two!"

As if to add to my stress, my daughter's mysterious chanting was ringing throughout the venerable Claes family garden.

At hearing her chanting, I felt like everything was in vain and was so tired, that I returned to the mansion as fast as I could.

I don't need you to become someone as wonderful and splendid as the saint I heard about today, but..... At least, I wish you would become a

little more respectable. I returned to my room and let out a deep, deep sigh.

After that, when my daughter returned to the house, I made sure to warn her to stop that weird chanting of hers..... The next day, the chanting sound of "let's go~!" resounded throughout the venerable Claes family garden.

★★★★★★★★

"Today, that daughter of mine -"

It's become a habit of mine to complain about our daughter to my husband in the bedroom.

"Well, as long as she's healthy and energetic, isn't it fine?"

Just like usual, he replied to me while smiling. My husband Luigi Claes is quite a looker, has a good personality, and is really capable, he's really such an amazing person, with only one flaw. It's that he spoils our daughter too much. Anyways, he loves her so much, that no matter what problem Katarina causes, he'll just forgive her with a wry smile. However, he better take a good look at the way our daughter is now, and get a good grasp on the situation, or I'll be troubled.

"Being so healthy and energetic, well isn't she just your dear little girlie..... To begin with, that girl's already set in her ways, it's already gone beyond what I can handle..... You should really take a good look around you..... Really, with the way she is, I wonder who it could possibly be that she even takes after."

As I said so, I let out a big sigh, and my husband looked at me like he was about to say something.

"What is it?"

“.....No, it’s nothing.”

After that, I just kept complaining about my daughter to my husband for a while. Really, I wonder who she’s supposed to be like..... As I was thinking such things, next to me who was falling asleep, my husband was saying something under his breath that luckily didn’t reach my ears.

“I think it’s that Katarina doesn’t only take after you in looks, there’s also many other parts where you’re alike.....”

## **28 – I fell into a pinch**

“How’s ‘Fortune Lover’ going? Did you beat it?”

During a break, my otaku friend A-chan asked me that with a smirk on her face.

“I was able to capture the self-important prince, but I still haven’t captured the evil sadistic prince..... The villainess rival’s quite amazing at getting in the way.....”

As I sighed and said so, A-chan’s smirk became even larger.

“Hehe, I’ve already cleared all of it.”

“Ehh, you’ve already cleared it all!?”

“Mmm, not only the four capture targets, I’ve also cleared all the hidden ones too.”

As she said so, I looked at my otaku friend who was dauntlessly smiling with admiring eyes.

“As expected of A-chan~, so fast~. I guess there are hidden capture targets after all.”

"Yep, after you clear all four capture targets you'll be able to go on their routes. By the way, do you want to know which characters they are?"

"Wait a minute, stop~~ spoilers are prohibited~~"

I said so and covered my ears, as A-chan's smile was looking rather sinister.

"The hidden characters are~"

"No~ I don't want to listen~~"

"Katarina-sama, it's morning. Please wake up."

"Mmm~, nooo, I don't want to listen~"

"Katarina-sama, stop being half-asleep, and if you don't get up soon, you'll be late for classes."

".....Mmm."

When I finally opened my eyes, I saw my maid Anne standing there next to me.

".....Anne, morning."

"Yes, good morning. Since you're awake now, please prepare quickly."

Anne was already briskly moving about, while my head still wasn't working quite yet and I just stared blankly..... I tried to remember the dream I was having just up until now.....

"Somehow..... I feel like that was a rather important dream....."

".....Dream?"

Anne replied to my muttering.

“Yeah, the dream I was having just up until now..... For some reason, I feel like it was a really important dream, but..... After waking up, I’ve forgotten it all~.”

“.....Is that so..... You did seem to be saying something in your sleep..... But it didn’t sound like anything important.....”

“Eh? Was that the case?”

Is that it, was it just my imagination? What kind of dream it was, I can’t remember at all..... Since Anne is saying so, that must be it.

Thinking that it was an important dream was probably just my imagination. And so I reached a conclusion, and began preparing to go to school.

It’s already been more than half a year since I’ve enrolled in school, and it’s just about to turn from fall to winter.

I’m already getting along really well with the game’s heroine Maria. Also, I’ve been able to become friends with students outside the student council as well. The field is going well, and I’m getting really good at throwing the toy snake.

I’m completely prepared for all oncoming destruction flags.

However, the only part I’m troubled about is, that I’m completely clueless about how love between the all-important Maria and the capture targets is progressing.

No matter how many times I asked Maria if she has anyone that she really likes, she would always reply with “I look up to and admire Katarina-sama” and dodge the issue. What’s more, Maria seems to have no self-awareness at all about how popular she is.

“I’m sure that all the boys in the student council are head over heels in love with you after being charmed by you, Maria” is what I enlightened her with.

“That’s definitely impossible. Everyone already has someone else that they’re head over heels in love with.”

Maria had a very surprised look on her face as she said that.

As for these capture targets, other than the heroine Maria who’s simply so charming, they shouldn’t have anyone else that they’d be head over heels in love with.....

I think Maria really needs to pull herself together, it seems that her traits as an otome game heroine “denseness” and “misinterpretation” are activating.....

Just recently, Maria and Keith also explored this topic together, and Keith had said “the person I’m always thinking about is incredibly dense” and he sighed as I accidentally overheard the conversation, I think that Maria’s denseness must really be quite something.

The capture targets probably have quite a lot of hard work ahead of them, eh.....

And so, even though I didn’t know how everyone’s love was progressing, everything else was going really well, and I was having a calm and peaceful school life. It suddenly ended.

The game’s finally started its movements, eh.....

During lunch break on a day that was quite cold, I was heading to the cafeteria with several of my classmates.

Usually, I would be together with my friends and stepbrother in the student council, but on that day, everyone else said that they had something else to do and would be there later.

Now that I think back on it, something around me seemed to be different that day. While the student council members are quite busy, and would sometimes have to work during lunch break, but..... Even so, for all of them to be missing, it's never happened before.

However, at that time I didn't suspect a thing at all, and my head was filled with thinking about the lunch menu for the day.

And so, without having noticed anything was off, I carefreely arrived at the cafeteria – that's when it happened.

“Katarina Claes. I have something important to say to you.”

Standing in front of me when I entered the cafeteria was a noble girl of quite high ranking.

Before I got engaged to Prince Jared, she had been the strongest candidate..... She was always someone who was glaring at me or verbally attacking me..... Honestly, she never says anything decent at all.

However, she also had upturned eyes and thin lips, and had a villainous face similar to me, I had always felt that she was a comrade in looks, but.....

The girl's upturned eyes were turned even further up while she was glaring at me, and she was blocking my way. My eyes became round as I had no idea what was going on.

However, behind this girl, were ten or so other students, and they were all glaring at me just like she was. As expected, it seems like just like her, they're all people that one-sidedly hate me and want to verbally attack me.

However..... I feel like I've seen this scene somewhere before.



“Katarina Claes, today, we shall publicize a number of your wrongdoings right here!”

The girl’s voice resounded loudly throughout the cafeteria as she confronted me.

There should be more than half the school gathered here at the cafeteria during lunchtime..... If you use such a loud voice..... The usually noisy cafeteria suddenly became quiet, as everyone seemed to be looking this way.

Perhaps she’s noticed this as well, the girl raised her thin lips.

During all this, as for me..... Honestly, I had no idea what was going on, and just stood there frozen still in confusion.

Something such as..... my wrongdoings..... That I’m practicing throwing my toy snake? No, but I haven’t even thrown that at a person yet..... I don’t think it would even be that annoying..... Or maybe the fact that I’ve been making a field at the school has been exposed? It’s something like..... having made a field at such a venerable school?

And then, without caring about the way my head was spinning from trying to think about the cause, the girl continued.

“You’re a duke’s daughter, and Prince Jared’s fiancée, you’re abusing your authority, and oppressing those of lower status than you! And, you’ve been jealous that Prince Jared and the student council have been on friendly terms with the holder of light magic, Maria Campbell, and you’re guilty of the crime of repeatedly harassing people!!”

“.....!?”

At this girl’s lines, I remembered..... I should have seen this somewhere before.

This is the event in the game which I’ve seen several times over where Katarina Claes is convicted of her crimes..... In front of all these

students, all her crimes were publicized, and Katarina fell straight to her ruin.....

And I had always been so vigilant, unbelievable, to suddenly get into such a predicament.....

I just dazedly looked at the girls in front of me. Everyone was staring at me with such grim faces.

However..... I really don't understand at all..... Indeed, no matter how I look at it, this is the event where Katarina gets condemned for her crimes, but.....

Originally, when condemning Katarina, the capture targets on the student council should have been here as well.

If it was the Jared route, Jared should have been here standing next to Maria and protecting her..... If it was the Keith route, Keith should have been here standing next to Maria and protecting her.....

Right now, none of them are here.....

I was completely confused, why this girl was taking the place of the game's student council members and accusing me loudly.

"It's no use to just play dumb! I've properly brought along evidence, and there's witnesses as well!"

And so, she opened up a bundle of papers, and gave a sign to the girls that were glaring at me while waiting near her.

On the paper, it listed a number of times that I have absolutely no knowledge of, how I've been bullying Maria..... After displaying written evidence of my wrongdoings, another girl witness testified to how she saw me bullying Maria several times over.

And so, various things like these followed one after the other, of course I was completely lost, and the classmates with me were as well, and there was an indescribable disquieting atmosphere in the cafeteria.

Everyone in the cafeteria was watching what was happening while holding their breaths with interest.

At that time..... Maria and my childhood friends on the student council appeared in the cafeteria. They came in from the opposite entrance on the other side that I had, and when they saw us, they inevitably saw the way how the girls were standing in opposition to me.

“Exactly what is going on here?”

Cutting through the disquieting atmosphere, looking at the girls who were surrounding me dubiously, it was Jared who spoke up.

And in response, as if she was just waiting for this moment, the girl in opposition to me who had originally been Jared’s fiancée candidate repeated what she said earlier about all of my wrongdoings.

Standing before me, Maria and my childhood friends on the student council’s faces were turning grim and dark.

Ahh, this is exactly how it was in the game’s Katarina crime conviction event.....

It would be either Jared or Keith that would reveal all of Katarina’s wrongdoings, but..... The appearance of Maria behind them as if she were being protected by both of them at the same time, I’ve never seen that in the game before.

In the game’s scenario, after a capture target revealed Katarina’s wrongdoings, Maria who had been hiding behind his back would come forth while harboring a strong will in her eyes. And then –

“This is the truth! I’ve always been harassed by Katarina Claes-sama like this!”

She would have a dignified attitude as she announced this. The people gathered here in the cafeteria would admire the strength and dignity that came from within her.

Right after these girls exposed Katarina's wrongdoings – it's exactly like in the game, Maria came out in front.

Since I've recovered my previous life's memories, I'm not like the game's Katarina anymore, and I've never done anything bad..... Yet..... It's still become just like the game.....

.....At this rate, without a doubt I'm going to be fully on the path to destruction.....

.....I'll be exiled out of the country by myself..... Or killed by one of the capture targets.....

Will I even be able to use the toy snake that's in my pocket..... Or if I'm exiled, will I be able to take my favorite hoe with me.....

Maria who had stepped forward was harboring a strong will in her eyes just like in the game. And then, she opened her mouth and said –

"This story is absolute nonsense! I've never been harassed like this by Katarina Claes-sama even once!"

Her dignified voice resounded throughout the cafeteria. Then, Maria changed the direction she was facing, and stood in front of me as if she was protecting me from the girls.

"Please don't insult the most important person to me with such nonsense!"

She rose her voice harshly in a manner that I've never heard before.

To Maria's reaction, at first the girls were shocked and froze up, but they regained their composure immediately.

"What are you saying! Maria Campbell! We're revealing Katarina Claes's wrongdoings all for you!"

"That's what I'm saying! It's all just nonsense! Including your so-called evidence and witnesses! As for you all, you're all just being deceived by this villainess!"

At hearing what she said, there was quite a commotion among the girls, but.....

“With only such little circumstantial evidence, proper evidence would be laughing at you right now.”

Jared had the bundle of papers in his hand as he said so. And even though he’s talking about how laughable it is, he isn’t laughing at all..... He’s expressionless. What is this, being expressionless is the default for Nico, but Jared is supposed to always be smiling..... At seeing his expressionless face, there was such an intimidating atmosphere overflowing from him that the girls who had all been making such a hubbub earlier all looked quite scared and became quiet.

“In the first place, with such a detailed level of harassment that’s written here, it’s impossible for my dense nee-san to have done it. And for the most part, I’m always with my nee-san, but I’ve never seen these girls calling themselves witnesses before..... Did you all really see something like my nee-san bullying people?”

While looking at the papers, Keith had a cold smile that I’ve never seen before, and the girls that were witnesses were going “eek!” and backing up as far away as they could.

“Really! Katarina-sama would never do such a thing! As Keith-sama just said, Katarina-sama is a very simple person! She would never be able to have such carefully thought-out plans!”

After Mary said so with such a grim expression, Alan was the one who spoke up next.

“Honestly, it’s just like that! This idiot is too dense to plan out bullying like this! Because she’s an idiot, all she knows how to do is challenge people head on!”

Sophia and Nico also seemed to agree with this.

“That’s right! Katarina-sama has no hidden side to her, there’s no way she could be so ingenious! That’s because Katarina-sama isn’t ingenious at all!”

“.....That’s right.”

.....Somehow, it seems that everyone is protecting me, but.....

.....What is it..... I also feel like they’re saying bad things about me.....

And so, after my friends had finished raising their voices – the classmates that had come to the cafeteria with me also said “that’s right! Katarina-sama would never do such things!” “It’s impossible that Katarina-sama would harass anyone!” with voices such as these following one after another. The voices started getting louder and louder, and was beginning to cover the entire cafeteria. Then –

“Just as everyone has been saying, it’s impossible for Katarina-sama to have been harassing anyone like that! Indeed, I’ve been harassed before, just like what’s written on this paper. But, it definitely wasn’t Katarina-sama that did such things to me! What’s more, Katarina-sama protected me many times! And, I remember perfectly well who was actually harassing me! If you like, I can even say who they were right now!”

Almost as if she was a totally different person from her usual calm and gentle self, Maria was so dignified and brave as she gave her speech.....

Many expressions changed amongst the people gathered in the cafeteria. Included among them were several of the girls that were confronting me, they had deeply downcast expressions.

They were clearly at a disadvantage..... The girls were no longer saying anything, the momentum they started out with was almost unbelievably gone now, and they hurriedly left the cafeteria.

Then, I was too lost for words at everything that had happened and just snuggled up to Maria who was next to me.

“Katarina-sama, are you alright?”

She was looking at me with a very worried face, and I nodded vigorously.

“Mmm, I’m fine. ....Uh, thank you, everyone.”

I thanked my friends, and also all the other people that raised their voices to defend me as well.

“It’s nothing. Rather, I apologize that we weren’t able to help you sooner.”

“Sorry for being late, nee-san.”

Jared and Keith both gently put a hand on my shoulders.

Before I realized it, they finally withdrew their outstretched hands. And then, a spectacular “growl~” came from my stomach. Since lunch had gotten delayed, it seems that my stomach has reached its limit.

“Anyways, it’s unbelievable that those girls tried to do such a thing to Katarina.”

“That’s right. Indeed, they viewed nee-san as their enemy, but..... I really don’t think that they have such an ability to take action against her.....”

“Yeah. Even though she’s like this, she’s still the daughter of a duke. If they insult her like this..... Their own positions may face various dangers. I didn’t see someone that was the type to take such an action.”

“Besides, this evidence as well..... I really don’t think it’s something that they prepared. It’s made a little too well.”

“Indeed, it’s just as Mary-sama said, I don’t think those girls could have prepared all the proper documents and evidence.”

“.....It’s also strange how all of us got called out as well for some reason or other.....”

Even though we were finally able to have lunch, my friends were talking about something with hard looks on their faces.....

I survived the condemnation event, I'm so overjoyed that I was able to avoid a destruction end.

Honestly though, the otome game doesn't end until graduation next year, so I still can't relax and let down my guard, but..... I was able to overcome the greatest pinch I've ever been in due to everyone's help. I'm really glad.

And so, while I was busy being on cloud nine, I didn't realize that Maria had been pondering something by herself all this time.

Then, when lunch was over and it was time to return to classes, Maria finally spoke up.

"I have somewhere else to go first, everyone, please go back first."

"Do you want to go together?"

Although the harassment seems to have subsided quite a bit, I'm still a bit worried about her and asked, but –

"No, it's nothing important, I'll be fine by myself. Everyone, please go ahead without me."

She refused flatly. I wonder if her stomach's feeling bad and she has to go to the restroom? In that case, I'd better not be too persistent about it.

"Mmm. I got it. There's not much time until classes start, so hurry up and return as well."

"Yep."

Maria replied with a smile, and went off in the opposite direction from the classrooms.

A bit later, I would deeply regret not having accompanied Maria at this time.



Even after telling Maria to come back soon, she never showed up to classes at all in the end. I thought that she might have been feeling worse and went to the infirmary to check up on her, but she wasn't there either.

Then, after that, we weren't able to find Maria anywhere.

After parting from her during lunch break, Maria Campbell's completely disappeared.....

## **29 – I forgot something important**

The second day after Maria disappeared. We all searched desperately for her, but found no traces at all, and weren't even able to get any clues.

All I had was impatience, and my heart was in a mess.

Why didn't I go together with her at that time..... My regret was increasing every day.

"Here. Drink this and warm your body up. Your complexion looks terrible."

The student council president said so as he poured some tea for me.

"Thank you very much."

I took the tea and began sipping. It's a gentle taste like always and it warmed my body.

In the student council room that was just like usual, I looked at the chair that Maria usually sat in.

Normally the student council president would be pouring tea for me, and Maria would be handing me sweets with a smile. But..... Right now, that smile's not here.....

“Maria-san’s quite dependable, and she has powerful light magic, I’m sure that she’ll definitely be alright.”

The student council president started talking to me in a gentle voice at seeing how I was frozen solid staring at Maria’s empty seat.

He also helped us in our search for Maria, and would comfort me with his gentle voice at seeing how depressed I was, being worried for my sake.

I’m not the only one that’s feeling painful..... My friends are probably all feeling painful as well..... Even the president was really friendly with Maria as well, there’s no reason why he wouldn’t be feeling painful as well.

Even though that’s how it should be, he’s still caring about how I am right now as well.

I can’t keep regretting and stay depressed like this. Let’s do the best that I can.

We’re definitely going to find you, Maria..... Please be safe, just wait, Maria.....

And so, on the night of the third day after Maria went missing.

After I finished dinner in the dorms, and returned to my room to prepare for myself, Jared visited me with a grim look on his face.

It’s a bit too late to be visiting normally, and I got a bad feeling from the grim look on his face.

“What exactly is it at this time of night? Could it be, something’s happened to Maria.....”

I was shaken as I said so, but Jared shook his head.

"I still don't know where Maria could be. ....But, I may have gotten some relevant information."

".....Relevant information?"

"First of all, please look at this."

As he said so, what Jared brought out was from the other day, the papers that recorded the evidence of my wrongdoings that the girls had during my condemnation event.

"This is from..... the other day....."

"That's right. It's the documents that those girls brought out as evidence the other day. I really couldn't get these documents out of my mind, and investigated them alongside searching for Maria, and....."

For some reason, Jared was much more concerned with the girls that caused my condemnation event than I was. But, after determining that the girls' positions and powers weren't enough to pose a threat to me, they seem to have been left alone. However, Jared's analysis was that someone other than those girls had caused the incident.

And, the documents that those girls had were not something that they could have prepared.

Jared was really bothered about this, so in these few days, in conjunction with searching for Maria, he also investigated this. Then –

"I learned a really strange thing. It wasn't those girls that had prepared all those documents."

".....What's that about?"

"It was someone other than those girls that prepared those documents. Then, even more oddly, those girls don't remember at all from who or where they got those documents from."

".....! .....Something like not remembering..... That's..."

“It’s really unbelievable, isn’t it. At first, I also thought that they were lying, but after confirming various things..... It seems that they really can’t remember anything.”

“!?”

Even though they had brought out that evidence with so much confidence, they didn’t even remember who or where they got those documents from..... Impossible..... In the first place, they shouldn’t have been able to print such things..... All those girls lost their memories.....

While I was dazed by all of this, Jared continued speaking with a grim face.

“But, that’s not all there is to it. All those girls don’t remember at all why they did such a thing on that day.”

“.....Eh.....”

“Indeed, they did seem to dislike you. That seems to be the truth. But even so, it didn’t seem that they were considering insulting you in such a public manner like that.”

Those girls indeed disliked Katarina Claes, and actually when I was alone, if I passed by them they would turn around and make snide comments at me. However, they didn’t have enough courage to actually attack me or anything.

I, Katarina Claes, am the daughter of a duke after all, and also since I’m the fiancée of the third prince Jared, I’m in quite a position of power. If they clumsily attack me, it’ll be them that’s hurt more in the end. Those girls are quite high-ranking nobles themselves as well, but, I really didn’t think that they’d be the type to confront me in a fight head-on.

Even so..... They were different on that day. On that day, they gave off the feeling of “no matter what, we have to take a swing at that annoying Katarina Claes today.” What’s more, all of them were like that.

However, after they dispersed from the cafeteria, a little later that feeling disappeared completely, what's more all of them were like "why did we do such a thing" and buried their heads in their arms, or so it seems.

".....But, if that's really true, it's such a strange story. It's almost as if all of those girls were being magically manipulated by someone else."

That's what I muttered, then Jared's expression became even darker.

"It's not almost as if they were being manipulated..... They might really have been manipulated."

".....EH!?"

"At that time, those girls seemed really strange to me as well."

"But..... Something like manipulating them....."

There's no doubt that humans can manipulate things like earth golems. In this world though, I've never heard of anything like hypnosis, and in the first place, something like being able to manipulate that many people at once.....

Next to me who was completely lost in confusion, Jared spoke up again with his grim face.

"Manipulating people..... It's possible if you have dark magic."

".....Eh, something like dark magic..... Was there such a magic?"

The types of magic in this world are divided into "water, fire, earth, wind, and light," and people with those magic powers would activate their latent abilities around a certain age. The school, and my home tutors as well, had taught me this knowledge that everyone knew even as a child.

The only types of magic are "water, fire, earth, wind, and light."

Even after coming to magic school here, I've never learned about any other types of magic.

“Born from dark magic, is a spell that can manipulate people’s hearts.”

“.....But, I’ve really never heard of such a spell or dark magic before.....”

“Dark magic is considered dangerous, so it’s forbidden, and its very knowledge has been concealed from everyone. Only the highest ranking people in the country know of it.”

“.....Dangerous?”

“It can manipulate your mind, and what’s more the one being manipulated won’t remember it at all, it’s a really terrifying magic.”

Manipulating your heart and mind without you knowing it, and what’s more causing you to forget about it afterwards. Indeed, that sounds really scary.

“.....But, if those girls were really being manipulated by dark magic..... The motive must have been to cause my fall. Does that really have something to do with why Maria went missing?”

It’s really scary if there really is someone behind all this using dark magic. Also, I don’t really know why they would manipulate those girls either.

But, the person with dark magic who caused this incident should probably have some kind of grudge against me. If that’s the case, there should be no relation to Maria at all.

“That’s right. If you think about it normally, the target is Katarina Claes, and Maria is completely unrelated. But, she’s a holder of light magic.”

“That’s true but..... What does that have to do with it?”

“It’s said that dark magic is impossible to detect, but..... In opposition to darkness, only those with the power of light magic are said to be able to detect it.”

“.....! Then, Maria.....”

“She must have noticed something during that incident, and then contacted the person with dark magic. Then, she got taken away somewhere, and all of the above is purely my deduction.”

Dark magic, a spell that can manipulate people’s hearts..... Did Maria notice something?? Then, was she taken away somewhere by someone.....

I suddenly received too much information and it went all over my head and I couldn’t think very well at all.

In the first place, I hadn’t known about the existence of dark magic up until now.

A forbidden, secret magic.....

Huh? But then, I wonder what happens to people that are born with dark magic?

“.....Uh, but if dark magic is considered dangerous and is a secret, what about people that are born with dark magic? Are they hidden from everyone after activating their magic powers? In the first place, it’s a magic that almost nobody knows about, isn’t it hard to find out even if their magic powers activate?”

I asked Jared the question that popped into my head.

“Dark magic isn’t something that people are born with like other types of magic. Dark magic is a type of magic that someone with magic already can acquire afterwards.”

“.....A magic that someone can acquire afterwards.....?”

Isn’t magic something that people have when they are born? Being able to acquire it afterwards..... What exactly does that mean?

While I was getting more and more confused, Jared told me in a quiet voice.

“There’s a ritual that’s required in order to acquire dark magic.”

“.....Ritual?”

“Yes, there’s a ritual. It’s said that you have to make an offering during a ritual in order to acquire dark magic.”

“Offering?”

At my question, Jared suddenly stopped talking, and then sighed deeply.

“In a dark magic ritual, you must offer a human sacrifice, in order to obtain dark magic. So, anyone who has dark magic must have exchanged it for someone’s life.”

I’m in a completely dark place. I was standing somewhere in a world where I couldn’t see anything around me at all.

All the people important to me had fallen down by my feet. Jared, Keith, Mary, Alan, Sophia, Nico, and Maria. There was no life to any of them.....

“Everyone, wake up, wake up!”

I desperately shouted, and shook everyone’s bodies, but not one of them moved.

“.....How could this be, how did it become like this.....”

I squatted by everyone’s sides who were all limp and unmoving. My body was trembling uncontrollably, and tears flowed out from my eyes.

Why did it become like this..... I’ve lost everyone important to me like this.....

If everything becomes like this, how am I supposed to face the destruction ends all by myself.....

“.....Why..... Why.....”



All I could do in that pitch black world was cry.

When I opened my eyes, I saw a familiar ceiling. It's the ceiling of the room I've been using in the dorms for more than half a year already. The room was still dark, and I couldn't see any light outside my window at all. The sun probably hasn't risen yet.

".....It..... was a dream."

My voice was hoarse, and my body was trembling slightly. There was cold sweat on my back, and when I touched my cheeks they were slightly wet. It seems that just like in the dream, I was crying in real life as well.

What a terrible dream that was. I hugged my still trembling body tightly with both arms.

You have to trade someone else's life in order to obtain dark magic. It's magic where the price is a life.

It's probably because that I heard such a scary topic, causing me to have such a scary dream. However, that future isn't impossible.....

In the game "Fortune Lover," the only person whose life was at risk in the Alan, Keith, and Jared routes was the villainess rival Katarina Claes. I never got a chance to clear the Nico route..... The rival character for the Nico route is his sister Sophia. I think that it's possible with how much of a siscon Nico is, he'd do anything at all for the sake of his sister.

That's why..... That kind of future definitely isn't impossible.....

This game world is dangerous for Katarina Claes. Just me. And so, in order to overcome these dangers, I've prepared various countermeasures over these seven years.

I often told myself that "everything will be alright."

Even so, that dream..... That scene wouldn't disappear at all from my mind.

In the end, I wasn't able to go back to sleep at all after that.

The next day, either because I hardly got any sleep at all, or because I had seen such a horrible dream.....I collapsed in the morning while meeting with everyone, and so Keith and Jared accompanied to the infirmary where I got some rest.

Is it because I didn't get enough sleep, I fell asleep the moment I hit the warm bed.

Quite a lot of time had passed when I woke up again, it was almost lunch break already, and as expected, Jared and Keith probably returned to class.

My head was completely cleared now thanks to sleeping so much, I thanked the infirmary nurse, and headed back to classes myself as well.

Yesterday, Jared had earnestly pleaded with me not to go anywhere by myself, but the short distance between the infirmary and classrooms shouldn't be a problem, I think. Since there's a shortcut in the garden between the infirmary and the classrooms, I'll go through there.

I walked through the garden that was filled with sunshine. Then, I saw the tiny bench from before that Maria had been having lunch on before.

Then, just a little..... I walked over to the bench, and sat on it as well.

Until we became really good friends, Maria had always been eating here by herself.

That cute, gentle Maria..... Even though it's already become completely natural that we'd be together now.....

If Jared's analysis yesterday was right..... Maria's in quite a lot of danger right now. After all, she might have gotten involved with someone with dark magic that sacrificed someone else's life.....

“Katarina-san? What are you doing in a place like this?”

Suddenly, I heard a voice behind me and I looked back in surprise, and the student council president was standing there with his usual smile.

“Uh, uhh..... I wasn’t feeling well, so I was just resting in the infirmary, and I was about to return to the classrooms.....”

“So that’s how it was. But, we still haven’t found Maria-san yet, it’s dangerous to be here by yourself in such an out-of-the-way place such as this. I’ll accompany you.”

“Th, thank you very much.”

And so, I took his outstretched hand that was proffered to me.

Then I suddenly had a thought. I wonder why would the student council president be in a place like this. Since classes are still going on right now, there weren’t any other students around. As for him, why would he be in a place like this?

As that question crossed my mind, and I looked at the president, while his brilliant red hair was sparkling from the sun’s rays.

At seeing that sight, a memory suddenly dug itself out of my mind.

“The hidden character is~ surprisingly bad~”

The smirking A-chan happily continued on with her spoilers despite my protests.

“He’s a dangerous person that has dark magic. If you capture him successfully, he’ll have a sweet daily life with the heroine, but..... If you fail, he’ll kill the heroine and all her friends in the student council, it’s a really bad end where everyone dies, isn’t it. – By the way, this hidden character..... Has brilliant red hair and grey eyes -”

Yes, I think I did hear something like this from A-chan.

The existence of a hidden character and his endings.....

The ending from the dream yesterday definitely wasn't impossible.....

The heroine and everyone in the student council dying..... Such an ending definitely existed.....

Cold sweat was running down my back.

Why did I forget such an important thing until now..... I'm really such an idiot.....

Brilliant red hair and grey eyes – I stared at the student council president who was smiling gently before me, Sirius Deek. This person's the hidden character in "Fortune Lover," the person with dark magic –

This gentle person..... Will take the lives of Maria and the other student council members, everyone important to me..... I really can't believe it at all.....

However, if Jared's analysis was right, this incident has to do with a dark magic user..... And the president – Sirius Deek, probably has the ability of dark magic.

Dark magic where you have to offer someone else's life in exchange.....

"Katarina-san, what's the matter?"

While holding his hand, I was completely frozen, while I was busy suspecting him Sirius spoke up. His expression was his usual gentle self.

Is it really this person.....

"President..... Do you have dark magic? And, what did you do to Maria?"

".....What's dark magic?"

Before I realized it, I asked him by reflex, and Sirius had a confused look on his face. It's a face that says he's never heard of such a thing before.

That's right. Most people probably wouldn't know about such a magic. As for me as well, I had just heard about it from Jared, and never knew about it until then.

He really might not know. While in the game he had dark magic, it might be different now in reality.

My friends are also quite different from the characters in the game. The president as well, there's quite a good chance that he's different from the game.

"That's right. You've probably never heard of such a thing. It's impossible that such a gentle president would do anything to Maria and us with the power of dark magic. I'm sorry for asking you such a weird thing."

That's it, I must have gotten something wrong. I really can't think that such a gentle president would do something like take other people's lives with dark magic at all.

That's what I thought, and when I looked at Sirius again –

I saw him looking at me with cold eyes that I had never seen before from him.

".....President.....?"

".....Gentle..... You said I'm always like that, right."

".....I mean, since president is really gentle and all....."

I was a bit shaken at his cold eyes and voice but still answered him, and then –

Sirius changed his expression.

“That’s all just acting. It’s really easy to pretend to be gentle and calm. It looks like it was so easy to fool all you idiots, eh.”

“!?”

At seeing how I opened my eyes wide in surprise, a smile appeared on Sirius’s face as if to make fun of me.

“By the way, I also kidnapped Maria Campbell. Because she found something out that she shouldn’t have. Also, Katarina Claes, I really hate you. Saying that you’re helping those that are lonely, saving people with the intention of being a hypocrite! I can’t help but be irritated whenever I look at you!”

He changed from his cold tone of voice, and now he was agitatedly shouting words full of anger towards me. He was still holding my hand in his really tightly as well, and it hurt quite a bit.

“You should just disappear somewhere already!”

Saying that I’m helping those that are lonely? Saving? Hypocrite? There’s so many things that I don’t understand about what Sirius is saying.

But, his words were so full of malice, I did understand that he seems to hate me.....

And, it seems that this person was the culprit who took away Maria as well.

Then, just like in the game, will this person take away everyone’s lives in the student council, everyone important to me.....

I looked into Sirius’s grey eyes. It was so different from his usual calm expression, his eyes were cold as ice.

He said that he himself kidnapped Maria. He said that his gentleness was all acting. All his words he spat out at me were full of malice.

Even so..... Why.....

“.....Are you alright?”

I reached out my free hand towards Sirius's face.

Sirius who had such cold eyes and said such words full of malice towards me.

Even so, in contrast to his words, his face looked so very, very bitter..... It seemed like he would cry at any moment.

His complexion looked terrible as well, as if he would fall over at any moment.....

When my outstretched hand touched his face, it was as cold as ice.

“.....You hypocrite..... That's enough out of you! Don't bother yourself with me! Don't get close to me! Don't smile at me! .....Disappear from my sight already!”

He knocked away my hand that was touching his face, and shouted at me.

Then..... For some reason, everything slowly turned dark before me. And, my consciousness gradually faded.....

“Just go to sleep like that. Keep sleeping until your life runs out.”

Sirius said so as if he were spitting it out.

The last thing I saw in my fading consciousness was –

Sirius was crying.

### **30 – My heart is in a mess**

“The tea that you pour for me has such a gentle taste to it.”

Mother said with a gentle smile as she stroked my younger self's head. Every day was peaceful and happy.

However, that happiness was suddenly stolen away from me..... In such a terrible way.....

Then, I swore to myself. That I would definitely get revenge on those that stole away our happiness from us, and take away both their lives and their social statuses.

I'm the only son of Marquis Deek, Sirius Deek. That's my current name.

Since I have magic power, I entered magic school when I was 15. Since my academics and magic powers were both really good, I got selected to be a member of the student council, and everyone in the Deek house praised me for it.

When I first started to often hear that person's name around me, was when I met my childhood friend Nico again at school.

The last time I met my childhood friend Nico, I think he was about ten years old or so, and we finally met again after five years, but..... Nico's changed so much in the last five years.

Before, he always seemed to be a boy with rather lonely eyes..... But now his eyes are shining, and loneliness is nowhere to be found in his eyes.

Honestly, I had felt a little close to him because of his lonely eyes back then, so I felt that it was too bad how he's changed.

And so, from Nico who's changed so much, I began to often hear that person's name.

"Katarina Claes," the daughter of Duke Claes.



For the taciturn and expressionless Nico, he would only ever talk about this girl, and when talking about her his usual expression would change from unmoving to a lively one. This girl was probably the person that removed the loneliness from Nico's eyes.

Then, during spring of next year, that girl appeared in front of me who had become the second-year student council president.

From Nico talking about her, I had thought that she'd be a beautiful, saintly person, but.....

When I actually met Katarina Claes, my first impression was that there was nothing special about this girl.

She was reasonably good-looking enough, but she was no match for Maria Campbell and the others that had been picked to be on the student council this year.

Also, she wasn't very smart either, and had almost no magic powers. Frankly speaking, this duke's daughter, had nothing more than the title of being Prince Jared's fiancée.

However, her fiancé Prince Jared and all the other outstanding members of the student council were head over heels in love with this unremarkable girl. What's more, the teachers threatened "if you don't let Katarina come and go as she pleases in the student council room, we won't let you use the student council room either."

Exactly what is it about that girl?

I thought it was really strange, but..... Honestly, as long as she didn't get in the way of my revenge, I didn't care either way.

But, in order for me to accomplish my revenge, I still needed to play the role of an excellent, calm student council president here, so I tried to get

along well in my own way with the new members of the student council. Because of that, there's also a need to treat the girl that they all love so much with a certain degree of courtesy.

That's why, on that day, when I brought out and poured some tea for Katarina Claes, it was just meant to be a simple courtesy.

"The tea that president pours for me has such a gentle taste to it."

When Katarina received the tea and drank it, that's what she said as she smiled gently.

I was terribly shaken at those words and that smile..... To the extent where my mask of calmness that I've been wearing for so many years almost crumbled.....

Up until now, the other student council members would just say "delicious" to the tea I poured for them, but..... There's only been one person in my life before that's said the tea I poured for them had a "gentle taste....."

What's more..... That gentle smile looked too much like her..... My chest began aching badly.

I was too badly shaken at that point, to remember how I responded to Katarina. However, I felt like a crack was appearing in the acting skills I've cultivated over many years from such an ordinary conversation.

And so, ever since that event, whenever I would come into contact with Katarina Claes, I would be severely shaken.

I've vowed revenge ever since that day when everything was stolen away from me, I've always lived only for that.

I covered myself with a mask of calmness, I got excellent grades, and while deceiving all those around me –

I used the dark magic that I had, and began my preparations. I gathered funds, forged evidence of crimes, and the day where I could take revenge by my own hands was coming soon.

And yet..... When it comes to dealing with Katarina Claes..... It's not going well.....

For the sake of my revenge, I've been coolly dealing in underhanded and shady business. And, even though I wasn't supposed to have any regrets, confusion, or have my heart be in a mess from all this.....

And yet..... Every time Katarina's clear light blue eyes look at me directly..... She would always say "president is really gentle" and smile towards me..... My heart became badly disturbed.

There's a girl named Maria Campbell in the student council. She's a commoner, a special girl that has the power of light magic. She's very smart, has powerful magic, and has beauty that's admired by many people, she's really such a fortunate girl. And yet, she had such lonely eyes.

Those eyes were very similar to Nico's from so long ago, so just like with Nico before her, I felt very close to her.

But, she changed as well.

After a certain point in time, the lonely atmosphere about Maria disappeared, and it looked like she was getting closer to Katarina and her friends outside of the student council as well.

And so, Maria's eyes began following Katarina around, and she would always smile so happily whenever their eyes met.

Katarina Claes was surrounded by so many people, and smiled so happily. Nico and Maria would look at her with sparkling eyes, and always look so happy to be by her side.

Katarina's appearance to them, was just like the saintly person that Nico had told me about before.....

However, whenever I looked at her, my heart couldn't help but be so unsettled..... Sometimes, the mask that I've cultivated for so long over the years would even fall off for short periods of time.

To me whose heart was so bothered by Katarina – “Don't bother with that kind of person! Keep making preparations for your revenge!” is what another me was telling myself.

But still..... No matter what, I found it impossible to ignore Katarina's existence.....

Coincidentally, I saw Maria Campbell being harassed once. I've heard that she's being bullied out of jealousy, but this is the first time I've seen it for myself.

Anyways, since Sirius Deek the student council president is supposed to stop these sorts of things, I stepped in and stopped it, and warned off the girls that were harassing her.

I asked her “are you alright?” and Maria replied with “thank you very much. I'm fine” and looked as if she was still standing quite firm.

Anyways, for noble children to be stooping to this level of harassment, I'm amazed at their shallowness.

Indeed, Maria Campbell is a commoner, and has a low social status compared to everyone else at this school. But, she has the power of light

magic. There's only a handful of light magic users in our country, and they're considered a very important existence.

Since Maria is special, the moment she entered this school, the ministry of magic's already been keeping an eye on her.

With light magic, and on top of that quite strong magic powers as well, the instant that Maria graduates from magic school, without a doubt she'll be entering the ministry of magic with quite a high ranked job as well.

If they keep harassing Maria who's been promised a high ranking position just lower than that of the king's in the ministry of magic like that, they'll definitely be punished for their crimes eventually. They're really so foolish because they don't even know that.

As I was thinking that, I suddenly came up with an idea. I wonder if Katarina Claes would be able to cover up these crimes that these foolish girls are currently committing right now. If, she wasn't able to cover up these kinds of crimes, even for a duke's daughter, she wouldn't get off easy. If everything goes right..... From this school, Katarina will..... She might disappear from my sight.....

If I do that..... If this girl disappears from my sight..... My heart might not be in such a mess anymore.

After I made my decision, I acted quickly. I investigated the harassment that Maria's been receiving, and let's make it as if Katarina was the one doing it.

After that, I'll just manipulate Katarina with dark magic, and then have her do various bad things to Maria and all will go as planned, but..... Things didn't go that way.

It's said that people with dark magic can freely manipulate people's hearts and minds. But, the way to obtain such a magic, as well as the dangers associated with it, is concealed from the public.

However, this magic definitely isn't all-powerful. It can't actually manipulate a person's heart and mind any way you want.

You can erase their memories, and take over their consciousness for a while, but..... You can't make them do what they don't want to do.

It's not possible to make someone love what they hate, or hate what they love.

If there's any jealousy or hatred present, I can increase it and make people take action, but..... Without jealousy or hatred in the first place I can't create it in them.

And so..... Katarina had no feelings of jealousy towards Maria at all.

I can amplify feelings of jealousy, and make her bully Maria, but..... I can't amplify what's not there.....

In the end, I wasn't able to enact my plan of having Katarina harass Maria.

Therefore, with only circumstantial evidence, I increased the jealousy and hatred of some girls that didn't think well of Katarina, and had them confront Katarina to denounce her. I also tried to separate her from her reliable knight-like friends, and at first, I was able to corner Katarina into a desperate situation, but.....

Katarina's knights appeared earlier than I had planned for and my plan ended in failure. My perfectly made evidence was also dissected apart by all those in love with Katarina.

And, the most unexpected occurrence of all, was Maria Campbell. With such a strong will, she clearly said "it's not Katarina." Despite all the evidence I had lined up against her, she still believed in Katarina so

much. At some point in time, just like Katarina's knights, she's already been completely captured by Katarina as well.

And so, my strategy to corner Katarina failed completely.

However, those girls completely forgot their memories from that time, and I also tinkered with the memories of the student council members about what they were doing during that lunch break.

That's why, it's not possible to trace this incident back to me.

I looked coldly at how happy Katarina was being surrounded by her friends, and returned to the student council room.

And then, this incident should have ended without the truth being revealed. However, a bit after I returned to the student council room and was finishing up some work, she appeared.

Maria Campbell, she had just brilliantly defended Katarina earlier and caused my plan to fail – the only person in this school with the power of light magic.

Lunch break is already over now, why would she be here now..... My question was immediately answered.

With an angry look on her face, Maria spoke up.

"Before, I felt like president had been glaring at Katarina..... At that time, I thought it was just my imagination, but..... I remembered it again during this incident..... But, I really couldn't believe that president would be related to this incident..... That's why I wanted to check how president was doing. ....Anyways..... President, what's that?"

"Maria-san, exactly what are you talking about? This incident? Is something the matter with Katarina-san?"

I pretended to be confused.

No way, my mask fell off for an instant, and of all things she saw me glaring at Katarina, what a great blunder I've committed, but there's no evidence whatsoever. I'm just going to pretend to not know what she's talking about, and immediately erase her memory.

".....You don't know what I'm talking about? But..... I think that president is related to this incident after all..... Because, around the president..... There's a black mist floating around you that's the same as what was around the girls that were confronting Katarina-sama!"

"!?"

Involuntarily, I opened my eyes wide and stared at the black mist..... Unbelievable, the black mist that was the evidence of dark magic.....

Up until now, I've used dark magic so many times and never had it pointed out to me, it had seemed to me that nobody else could see it.

– It must be because of the power of light magic. Ever since I've acquired dark magic, I've never met a person with light magic until now.

Dark and light magic counter each other.

Since Maria Campbell has light magic..... Maybe that's why she can see the evidence of dark magic.....

She was firmly looking at me with a severe look on her face..... As expected, if I keep going on like this, things might get difficult for me. In that case.....

"Haha, as expected of a holder of light magic. That's right. I was behind this incident. All in order to get rid of that annoying girl."

"!?"

I walked slowly towards Maria who was frozen still while staring at me. I can't activate dark magic unless I'm touching them, so I reached out my arm and touched Maria on her shoulder.



“.....But, it’s better if you don’t know those things anymore.”

I used dark magic to erase all the bad things about me from Maria’s memory, and in a few seconds, Maria will have forgotten our entire conversation today. That’s how it was supposed to be..... But.....

“Well then, Maria-san. Classes are about to start, so let’s return to the classrooms.”

“.....What are you talking about? President. I’m not done talking with you yet.”

Maria had a dubious expression on her face.

.....It couldn’t be.....

Once again, I tried using dark magic on Maria, but.....

“What exactly have you been trying to do just now?”

Maria kept looking at me with a dubious look on her face..... It seems that my magic doesn’t work on her..... It can’t be, as a holder of light magic..... Does dark magic not work on her.....

If I can’t erase her memory..... Then, I can’t let her go just like this.

“President, why is it that Katarina-sama.....”

Since magic doesn’t work on Maria, I just knocked her out with a physical attack instead.

Maria’s learned something she doesn’t need to know, there’s no way I can just let her return to Katarina and the others just like this without having erased her memories. And so, I moved the unconscious Maria to a secret room within the school.

Everything’s been going well up until now, and this is the first major blunder I’ve committed.

This is also..... all Katarina Claes’s fault.....

“That girl’s in the way” is what the other me was telling myself.

Katarina and her friends immediately found out that Maria was missing.

And so, they did their very best to search for Maria.

About the existence of this secret room at school, only a few people in the Deek family know about it, and they shouldn’t be able to find it so easily, but.....

At any rate, I can’t just keep Maria locked up in there forever. I tried using dark magic on Maria many times over after that, and I was lost at what to do with her since she’s completely unaffected by magic.....

“Rather than leaving her like this, let’s kill her to shut her up forever” is what the other me was beginning to say.

The fourth day after Maria’s confinement began, I went to see how she was doing during a self-study break. Maria seemed to be quite down, and I wondered if dark magic would finally work on her now as I spied on her, but..... Even though she’s been confined to a small and dark room, Maria was still standing firm.

In disgust at the way she hadn’t changed at all, and on my way back to the campus, I found a single person all by her lonesome sitting on a bench in the school garden.

That person was Katarina Claes, the main person responsible for driving me into this predicament.

“Katarina-san? What are you doing in a place like this?”

Katarina seemed to be really surprised at the voice behind her as she looked back.

“Uh, uhh..... I wasn’t feeling well, so I was just resting in the infirmary, and I was about to return to the classrooms.....”

Indeed, as she said, she didn’t look well.

“So that’s how it was. But, we still haven’t found Maria-san yet, it’s dangerous to be here by yourself in such an out-of-the-way place such as this. I’ll accompany you.”

As the student council president Sirius Deek, I have to act like this. And so, I stretched out my hand for her to take.

“Th, thank you very much.”

When Katarina placed her hand in mine with a smile – just like always, my heart started getting discomposed.

I’m feeling really uncomfortable from how sunny the garden is. I really want to get back to the classrooms as soon as possible.

But for some reason, Katarina froze up after taking my hand.

“Katarina-san, what’s the matter?”

When I asked her, Katarina just stared straight at me with those light blue eyes of hers. Then –

“President..... Do you have dark magic? And, what did you do to Maria?”

I’m really badly shaken but... Because of my long years of acting, I was able to reply smoothly.

“.....What’s dark magic?”

I acted as if I’d never heard of dark magic before, and pretended to be confused.

Katarina seemed to be thinking about something as she tilted her head.

Why did she ask me something like this so suddenly..... In the first place, does she know something about dark magic, or did one of her excellent knights detect something.....

However, I can't admit that I know anything right now. Katarina doesn't seem to be so sure of the answer like Maria was, so it shouldn't be too hard to deceive her. Even though that's what I intended.....

"That's right. You've probably never heard of such a thing. It's impossible that such a gentle president would do anything to Maria and us with the power of dark magic. I'm sorry for asking you such a weird thing."

When I saw how Katarina was laughing like usual as she said so – something within me snapped.

Before I realized it, the calm mask of Sirius Deek that I had been wearing for many years had completely fallen off.

".....President.....?"

Katarina seemed to be a bit shaken as she looked at me.

".....Gentle..... You said I'm always like that, right."

".....I mean, since president is really gentle and all....."

Even after seeing my mask fall off, Katarina's still saying such things. She's really stupid.

"That's all just acting. It's really easy to pretend to be gentle and calm. It looks like it was so easy to fool all you idiots, eh."

"!?"

At seeing how Katarina opened her eyes wide in surprise, a smile appeared on my face because of how idiotic she was.

“By the way, I also kidnapped Maria Campbell. Because she found something out that she shouldn’t have. Also, Katarina Claes, I really hate you. Saying that you’re helping those that are lonely, saving people with the intention of being a hypocrite! I can’t help but be irritated whenever I look at you!”

It was as if everything that had been bottled up inside me came pouring out the moment that the dam within me broke.

“You should just disappear somewhere already!”

I had nothing but words full of hatred and malice for the girl in front of me.

With this, Katarina should be quite afraid of me..... She might even look at me and return the same kind of words full of hatred and malice back to me at this rate. That’s what I thought, but.....

“.....Are you alright?”

Katarina’s response was such a question..... And, for some reason, she was looking at me worriedly.

Why is this..... Why are you still looking at me with those eyes..... Did you even hear what I said just now..... Even though I just said I kidnapped Maria.....

And then, Katarina reached out her other hand that I wasn’t holding, and touched my cheek, as gently as if she was caring for me.

Why..... Why..... Why.....

Why aren’t you afraid of me, why don’t you hate me..... Don’t look at me with those eyes!

I knocked away the warm hand that was touching my cheek.

“.....You hypocrite..... That’s enough out of you! Don’t bother yourself with me! Don’t get close to me! Don’t smile at me! .....Disappear from my sight already!”

If you look at me with those light blue eyes – If you get close to me – If you smile at me –

I won't be the me that I've been up to now anymore.....

"I'll do anything for revenge" is what I've sworn, but I'm wavering – The other me kept urging me to "get rid of this girl" and –

At his urging, I used dark magic on her hand that I was still holding.

"Just go to sleep like that. Keep sleeping until your life runs out."

In front of my eyes, Katarina slowly collapsed onto the ground –

I robbed her consciousness, and forced her into dreamland, and she'll probably keep sleeping like this in a dream.

Until her life runs out –

With this, that annoying girl is finally gone. I'll be able to live just like before, only thinking about revenge.

My heart won't be in a mess anymore.

Even though that's how it was supposed to be..... The pain wouldn't disappear from my chest.....

On the contrary..... At seeing Katarina asleep like that..... My heart became even more discomposed.

Something similar to water was dripping out of my eyes. Exactly what is this, I wonder.

## **31 – Having met you**

In a room that was dimly lit due to the sun having already gone down, while I was sitting in a chair next to the bed, I got an anxious feeling for

yet another time, and rushed to the bedside. Then, I checked the breathing and temperature of the person sleeping there, and let out a sigh of relief.

There was a girl sleeping quietly on a bed in a dorm room.

The person most important to me, Anne Sherry, in this world – Katarina Claes-sama.

Without even the slightest movement, Katarina-sama was deeply sleeping there.

What if her breathing ends up stopping..... What if her body becomes cold.....

Being driven by my anxiety, I continued checking her breathing and temperature every ten minutes or so.

It's already the second day since Katarina-sama's become like this.

I just kept staying by Katarina-sama's side, and could hardly even sleep at all. I also didn't have much of an appetite. My coworker maids told me many times "we'll take your place and attend to her, so go rest," but I really didn't want to switch at all.

When I think that something might happen to Katarina-sama while I'm not by her side..... I'm finding it impossible to leave her side at all.

I held the sleeping Katarina-sama's hand, and looked at her face.

She has such a lively personality, that even when sleeping she would always move around, and often send the blanket flying with her kicks, at seeing how she was sleeping without moving at all – I intensely felt that this situation was completely abnormal.

Why..... did it become like this.....

Two days ago, during midday, Katarina-sama was found collapsed in the garden and brought back to her dorm room here.

What I heard from Prince Jared was, Katarina-sama wasn't feeling well in the morning so she went to the infirmary to rest, and around the time of lunch break she told the nurse "I'm going to return to the classrooms now."

And so, since she never arrived at the classrooms in the end, everyone started worrying about her and began searching, and found her collapsed by herself in a corner of the school garden.

However, no matter how much we called out to her there was no reply, so we immediately moved her to the infirmary, and when the doctor checked her condition he said "she's only sleeping." But..... After that, no amount of calling out to her would wake her up, and we ended up moving her back to her own dorm room.

And then we had the doctor check her again, but his diagnosis was still "she's only sleeping."

Then at seeing how Katarina-sama wasn't waking up at all, the frustrated Prince Jared used his authority as a prince, and summoned one of the best doctors in the country here.

He's an elderly doctor who has quite the splendid mustache, and is the one in charge of the royal family's health, one of the top class doctors in the country. If it's this person, maybe he'll be able to do something, is what I hoped, but.....

"Honestly, I have no idea what's going on. No matter how much I examine her, there's no problems with her body. She might even open her eyes right now, or she might keep sleeping just like this."

"What will happen if she keeps sleeping just like this?"

Prince Jared asked with a grim expression on his face, and the doctor replied with a deeply sad expression.



“.....If she keeps sleeping just like this..... Without being able to eat or drink..... In that case, before long, her life will be in danger.”

“Such a thing!? Such a stupid thing!?” Keith-sama had lost his usual calmness, and was desperately pleading with the doctor.

When I looked to see what had caused a sudden loud noise, it was Prince Jared who had slammed his fist into the wall without having made a sound himself at the impact, and without a sign of his usual smile.

Mary-sama was extremely pale and trembling badly, and it seemed that she might collapse at any moment as well. Prince Alan’s expression was one that I’ve never seen as well, he was so terribly stiff.

Sophia-sama just stood there without saying anything, shedding tears from her eyes. Nico-sama was clenching his fists so tightly that they were changing color.

And so I took in how everyone was doing, and I also felt that I myself would collapse right then and there if I allowed myself to relax.

If Katarina-sama loses her life.....

I felt an intense despair from the sudden fact that confronted me.

After that, many other doctors came to see her as well, but the cause was still unknown, and Katarina-sama still wouldn’t wake up.

Once, we asked one of the only light magic users in the entire country who also had the power of healing magic to come visit, but..... The result was still the same.

One day passed, and then another..... There was no sign that Katarina-sama would wake up.

The person that changed me from a tool into a human. The most important person to me in the world.

Even though I had decided to always be by your side and live with you –

I beg you. Katarina-sama, please, please, don't leave me alone.

I gripped the sleeping Katarina-sama's hand tightly.

★★★★★★

"No, no. Please don't worry about such a scratch, Prince Jared. Anyways, the scar will be no problem at all because my bangs will hide it anyhow."

And so, it's been seven years since the day she said that while smiling at me. My all-important fiancée, Katarina Claes.

This funny girl had appeared in front of me when I had been forgotten by everyone in the royal palace and was spending every day bored to death.

While spending time with this girl who had hilarious actions, words, and hobbies – My world that was completely boring drab grey became filled with vivid colors instead.

In my boredom, I hadn't even known any other feelings besides boredom. What's happy, what's fun, Katarina taught everything to me that didn't know anything. Jealousy and pain as well..... They're all emotions I never would have experienced if I hadn't met Katarina.

After the seven years I've spent with Katarina since meeting her, I don't want to return to that grey, boring life without Katarina anymore.

At first, I had ulterior motives for getting engaged to her. However, before I realized it, I began to love the person known as Katarina Claes more than anyone else in the world.

Since she was innately a harem protagonist, there were many people that loved her hanging around her, but..... I have no intention of ever giving her up to anyone else, since she's already in my grasp, I'm definitely never going to let go.

And yet..... For such a thing to have happened.....

Even though I know that danger is approaching Katarina right now..... I can't do anything to protect her. I'm filled with strong regret and remorse.

Katarina might have become this way because of dark magic. That's what I thought, and I even had a light magic user come here, but..... In the end, we learned nothing. "If it's a strong light magic user, we might find something out" is what I thought, but..... The only person who has even stronger light magic, Maria Campbell, still remains missing. The situation wasn't improving at all.

I'm so frustrated at how powerless I am and that there's nothing I can do..... I punched the wall with all my might, and clenched my swelling fist tightly.

★★★★★★★★

"Keith, because we have become siblings now, it's fine to just call me nee-san."

It's been seven years since she said so while smiling and holding her hand out to me. Even so, I remember that day as clearly as if it were yesterday.

I was reviled as a monster, and would always hug my knees alone by myself in my dark room. Then, such a warm hand reached out to me.

She told me “I’ll always be with you” with a smile on her face and brought me out from my dark room into such a bright world. My all-important stepsister, Katarina Claes.

I have more than just brotherly affections for her warm smile and gentleness, she’s the most important person to me in the world.

We’ll be together forever, and I had always intended to keep being together with her. There’s no way that I’ll let her so-called fiance Prince Jared have her so easily.

I’ve vowed that I would definitely protect her with my own hands. For that purpose, I desperately learned swordsmanship and magic, as well as how to become a proper noble. Everything was all in order to be able to protect her myself.

And yet.....

Why did it come to this..... Why wasn’t I together with her at that time..... Even though I had vowed that I would definitely protect her.....

Regret was surging up within me.

When I became the Claes family’s adopted son at eight years old, neesan was always by my side whenever times were difficult, and she always smiled gently towards me.

Right now, I want to see that gentle smile so much.....

I don’t want to lose Katarina.....

I tried to stop my body from shaking.

★★★★★★

“Mary, you have a green thumb! It means your hands have a special talent for growing plants! Yep, you and your green thumb are an amazing, special existence!”

She held both my hands tightly as she said so on that day, I still remember it clearly. I was just a cowardly wimp, always running away with my head down. I really hated how I was.

To such a me, Katarina Claes called me an amazing, special existence. I was so, so happy.

My older sisters would call me “dirty,” and I also hated my auburn hair and eyes – When Katarina said she loved it, and told me it was pretty I began to like it as well.

In order to stand by Katarina’s side, and become a splendid lady, I worked really hard.

Honestly speaking, many times over, I almost gave up. But, because Katarina was together with me, and said she liked me and that I was important to her, I was able to keep going.

Everything that Mary Hunt is today is all because Katarina Claes was beside me.

And so, from now on as well, I always wanted to be by her side forever. What’s more, to the point where I really want to steal her away from her fiance, she’s my favorite, most important person.

And yet.....

Seeing how Katarina was sleeping there so quietly almost as if she had died already, things were going dark before my eyes, and I desperately braced myself the best I could.

At this rate..... I can’t just keep feeling down like this.....

I'm Katarina Claes's close friend, Mary Hunt. I'm different from that weak girl I was before!

If there's anything that I can do for Katarina now, it's..... I fixed my posture, and raised my head.

★★★★★★★★

"Prince Alan surely also has things that you are good at, it's natural that people will be more suited to some things than others."

To the completely inferior me who had always been compared to my older twin, that's what she told me.

That girl's light blue eyes looked directly at me, and she would never go easy on me in a match, the hilarious girl who could climb trees like a monkey, Katarina Claes.

I had been troubled by whispers behind my back, and she returned me back to sanity from being filled with delusions of grandeur. After meeting Katarina, I was finally able to get rid of the feeling of powerlessness pressing down on my shoulders as well.

She was always so direct, it was very comfortable being by Katarina's side. That's why, I always stayed by her side as if it was the natural thing to do.

That..... How did it come to this.....

That I might lose Katarina..... When I thought that, I experienced a terror that I've never experienced before.

Then, I noticed it for the first time. To me, Katarina had already become a very important person..... What's more..... To the point where I always wanted to be by her side.....

How could I have been so dense. Something like only noticing my feelings after being in danger of losing her.....

Since she's my older twin's fiancée..... I've never thought of her that way before.

Even so..... I still want to stay as close by as allowed. I can't bear the thought of losing her right now.

I want to do something to be able to help Katarina.....

★★★★★★★★

"Your parents are so wonderful, and your sister is so cute as well, Nico-sama, you're a really lucky person."

I still can't forget the day that she said that to me while smiling.

People decided on their own that my important family was a misfortune upon me, and pitied me..... No matter how much I told people "I'm lucky" they wouldn't understand.

I thought that nobody would ever understand..... I had already given up.

Katarina Claes understood what I was thinking. My frustration at how others didn't understand finally burst out of my chest, and I was filled with a warm feeling instead.

Ever since that day, Katarina became a special person to me.

Since I wasn't really that good at dealing with other people, I often averted my eyes.

However, Katarina would always look straight at me with those light blue eyes of hers, and smile brightly like the sun. It was very comfortable being by her side.

Katarina's the fiancée of my childhood friend, the third prince.

I had always thought that we'd all be together forever.

Even though I had always thought that I'd stay as close by as allowed by her side.....

"You're excellent, you'll definitely be the next prime minister" is what people around me said about me, but I hate myself for being unable to do anything for the most important person to me.

I can't even protect the person most important to me, what's all this about the next prime minister supposed to be.....

Once again, I clenched my fist as tightly as I could, to the point where my nails were digging streaks of blood into my palms.

★★★★★★

"I think, that Sophia-sama's silken white hair, and eyes that sparkle like rubies are very beautiful in my opinion."

My appearance that was different from others was called creepy and cursed. This girl told me "it's beautiful," and right after she took my hands in hers and said "won't you be friends with me?"

At first, I thought that I was just having a really good dream, but..... I didn't wake up from the dream.



She's the first friend I've ever had since I was born, and would always smile so gently at me.

Ever since meeting the girl known as Katarina Claes, my world's changed so much. I've flown out from the gilded cage of my room that I've always stayed in, to under the bright sun. I finally obtained the happy days that I've always been dreaming about inside my room.

I wished that these days would continue forever. Even though that's what I hoped.....

Why..... Why did it come to such a thing.....

During these two days, if I lost focus for even an instant tears would come pouring out. I cried so much, that I thought all the moisture in my body should have dried up already..... Yet tears would still keep flowing out.

Since the two days that Katarina's collapsed, I've tried my best to keep standing. I've visited her room so many times, and kept calling out to her, but there's no reaction at all, and my chest would tighten at seeing how she continued to sleep.

Truthfully, I wanted to be by Katarina's side forever. But, "you can't say things like that" is what my brother lectured me with in the dorm rooms.

But, being separated like this right now, at this moment, I'm so unsettled from a strong sense of anxiety at the thought of possibly losing Katarina.

During these two days, various doctors have been here to check up on Katarina, but none of them found a way to wake her up.

If she keeps sleeping like this, Katarina's life will be in danger.....

At first, I didn't feel like this was real, having been confronted with the facts so suddenly. No matter which doctor it was, they would always

reply unfavorably during these two days, and reality crept closer and closer.

At this rate, I really might lose Katarina..... I won't be able to see that smile anymore. I definitely couldn't stand that! I don't want to lose her!

As I thought that as hard as I could, that's when it happened.

"That's it! It's unbearable! I don't ever want to lose anyone again!"

From somewhere, I suddenly heard a voice. It's a voice I've never heard before, yet it was still somehow nostalgic.

I was surprised, and looked all around, but there was nobody else in the room besides the servants.

"Even though I was finally able to meet her again..... I don't want to lose her! ..... This time, I'm going to help that girl! So, stop crying uncontrollably in a place like this, and take me to where she is!"

It was as if I was hearing a mysterious voice coming from myself. Under the mysterious voice's orders, I stood up and headed for Katarina's room.

"Sophia-sama!? What are you doing at this time of night!?"

The maid that was attending to Katarina raised her voice in surprise at my sudden visit.

Well, that's to be expected. It's already the middle of the night, and I suddenly visited without prior notification. Normally, this would be considered very out of the ordinary. Even so, I felt that I absolutely had to come here. Also, because that mysterious voice had appealed to me as well.

“.....Katarina-sama.”

I approached the bed, and firmly grasped both her hands in mine.

When doing so, it seems that my odd behavior has been reported, and my brother came to pick me up.

“Sophia, please calm down.”

As he said so, he placed a hand on my shoulder, and prompted me to return to my room, but..... I categorically rejected it.

Somehow everyone seems to have been informed, and before I realized it, Jared, Keith, Mary, and Alan, everyone has gathered here as well.

Even so, I just kept holding on to Katarina’s hands, and wouldn’t move.

And, I brought her hands to my forehead and closed my eyes praying “please, I’m begging. Please help Katarina” with all my might.

Then, reflected on the back of my eyelids, was a girl I’d never seen before. She had black hair and eyes, and even though I haven’t ever seen her before, she still felt familiar and nostalgic, how strange.

“I know it! She’ll definitely come back! You should keep calling for Katarina here!”

After the girl with such a strong will in her eyes said so, she disappeared.

★★★★★★

It’s been two days since I used dark magic to cause Katarina to fall into a deep sleep.

Her knights desperately tried various methods to wake her up, but none of them worked. It's something that only the caster can cancel.

At this rate, Katarina will probably just keep sleeping until her life runs out.

That's what my wish was.

And yet..... For some reason, my chest was restless. When I think that at this rate Katarina will lose her life..... My chest would tighten painfully.

.....No, I don't want to lose her..... I want to cancel my dark magic.....

"What kind of stupid things are you thinking about!?" The other me was yelling angrily.

"That girl is getting in the way of our revenge! We have to get rid of anyone that gets in the way of our revenge!"

.....But.....

To the confused me, the other me raised his voice even more roughly.

"The reason that you live is so that you can take revenge! The meaning of your life is so that you can cast those that stole away your mother's life and made a tool out of you down to hell! Did you forget, your mother's last words!"

.....That's right.....

The last words of the mother that I loved so much..... ".....Please, take revenge....." The last words of my dying mother have become the meaning of my life.

The only reason that I'm living is so that I can take revenge

**Side story 6 - Having met you +**

~Keith Claes~

"It would have been better if you'd never been born."

"It's annoying to have to take care of that nuisance."

"Get away from me! Monster!"

Why, why, why does everyone hate me? Why doesn't anyone want me around them? I don't like being by myself. It's lonely. Please, someone, anyone is fine, be by my side.

When I woke up, I saw a ceiling that I had gotten used to in the last few months. That's right, this is Duke Claes's house, and I've become his adopted son. I let go of my breath.

Ever since I was born, I've always been treated as a nuisance and someone to be hated. But, ever since coming to the Claes family, I've been treated so nicely. We ate hot meals together as a family, and they had gentle hands that cared about me. Up until now, all the things that I had always wished for but never gotten were finally in my hands.

Even so, from time to time, I would still dream of the old days. The people that denied and despised me. Even though it's things from long ago..... My chest still hurt.

Today, I'm supposed to attend a tea party together with my stepsister Katarina. With some pain still remaining in my chest, I began preparing.

"Keith, thanks for coming along with me today."

In the horse-drawn carriage on our way to the tea party, the always bright Katarina was grinning as she said so to me. At seeing Katarina's smiling face, the pain in my chest lightened a little.

"I'd feel a bit lonely if I was alone, since I'm not that good at remembering people's faces. It's such a great help since Keith's coming along."

As she said so, Katarina's light blue eyes were looking at me directly.

"Keith. Thank you for coming to the Claes family. I'm so happy to have become siblings with you."

At her words, I thought I was involuntarily going to cry. A warm feeling completely replaced the painful feeling in my chest left from the dream earlier.

Katarina Claes is really such a mysterious girl. When I wanted it the most, she gave me the words I wanted to hear.

".....Me too, coming to the Claes family, and having met nee-san, I'm really happy."

When I said so, Katarina gave me a gentle smile again. I'm really glad to have met this person, is what I thought from the bottom of my heart.

~Mary Hunt~

After meeting Katarina, I decided to become a splendid lady in order to stand next to her, and several months have passed since I first started working hard. There was so much I had to do in matters such as academics, dance, and etiquette.

But originally, I didn't have any special talents or anything, and since my tempo was slower than others, I couldn't do anything smoothly. That's why, I had to put in double the effort of others, and worked as hard as I could.

For academics, I asked my home tutors questions for as long as time permitted, and I worked sometimes until very late at night. It was the same for my etiquette lessons, I repeated things over and over again

until I got it right. As for dancing which I was really bad at, I practiced until blood soaked through my shoes from how much they were rubbing against my feet.

At seeing how desperately I was trying, my older sisters laughed at me.

“Even though you have no talent, it’s so disgraceful that you’re working so desperately.”

“It’s embarrassing as a noble daughter to be that desperate.”

“Because her social status is lower, her abilities must be lower too.”

Those words mercilessly pierced my heart, and I felt a pain in my chest.

Even so, if I’m spending time with Katarina, that pain will be significantly lessened. One day, this happened.

“.....”

“What’s the matter? Mary, are you alright?”

Because I suddenly stopped and squatted, Katarina was peeking at me worriedly. I had come to Katarina’s house to play, and we were walking through the garden on our way to Katarina’s field. I had felt a severe pain in my foot. When I looked at it, I could see a faint blur of blood.

“Oh no! Mary, you’re injured! Did you bump it somewhere!?”

To the panicked Katarina, I also hurriedly replied.

“.....I, I’m fine. It must be that, yesterday, I practiced dancing for a little too long.”

“Practiced dancing?”

“Yeah. Since I’m bad at dancing, I have to practice twice as hard as others.....”

After saying that much, I didn't know what else to say. This is, if I don't desperately practice to the extent where I rub my feet raw, I wouldn't be able to do even one dance well is what I thought. Will Katarina laugh at me..... When I looked up at her, I saw her anxiety. Her face wasn't like my sisters that were making fun of me, her eyes were sparkling instead.

"Trying your best to overcome your weaknesses, Mary's really so great. I really respect you. I also have to learn from you."

No matter how hard I worked..... I was only made fun of with cruel words. "How desperate" is what they said and laughed at.

But, I'm okay now no matter what they say. After all, because I can come here. Because there's a person here who says I'm great and that she respects me.

As Katarina took me by the hand and said "let's go back to the house and treat your wound," this is what I thought strongly over and over again.

I'm really glad to have met Katarina Claes.

## **32 - This is my world**

"How long are you going to keep sleeping there! This idiot~!"

At the same time as hearing such shouting, my blanket was suddenly thrown off me.

".....Eh, eh, what?"

It was too sudden that my eyes became round from the sudden event, and the person who threw my blanket off was glaring at me.

".....Eh, m, mother.....?"



“Mother? .....What’s the matter, you must be feeling bad. Are you still asleep?”

“.....Eh, huh? .....G, good morning. Mom.”

I looked up at mom who was standing there imposingly. Her eyes were somewhat low-set and her face was a little round, seeming rather like a raccoon.

Then, “you’re a high school student already, act properly already and check your hair and clothes” and when I looked at myself in the full-length mirror that had been forcibly installed in my room, I saw an ordinary raccoon-like face that greatly resembled my mom’s.

What’s this? I felt like something was wrong. Was my face supposed to be like this..... No, it is indeed this face..... But, right now my face is more.....

“What are you wasting time for! If you don’t hurry up, you’ll be late!”

Mom was being mad at me, and when I looked at the clock..... It was already cutting it really close. I jumped out of bed in a hurry, and started preparing for school.

I took off my pajamas and put on a sailor uniform, and I quickly splashed my face with some water to finish washing up.

Mom said “at least do something about your hair” like she always does, but, no matter how much I tried to straighten out my stubborn bedhead it wouldn’t fix itself at all, and I gave up.

Well, right now my hair is relatively smooth because Anne will properly take care of it for me every morning, but..... Huh? My hair right now? Anne will take care of it for me? Who’s Anne?

Once again, I really felt like something was wrong. Something’s off. Did I..... forget something really important?

Ah! It’s already this late! If I don’t really hurry up, it’ll be bad!

The suspicions I had disappeared in an instant when I saw what time it was. I don't have any time anymore to be leisurely thinking about such things.

I hurried up and got to the living room as fast as I could, where my older brother who was a college student was having a relaxing breakfast. My other older brother who was already a company worker as well as my father seemed to be off to work already.

"G, good morning. No matter how old you get, it seems that you won't wake up unless we take the blanket off you."

As my brother said so with a wry smile on his face, mom quickly brought over a lunchbox for me.

"Thank you."

I thanked her, and when I received the lunchbox, my stomach immediately went "growl~."

There was a delicious breakfast lined up on the table before me, and my stomach felt quite empty, but there really wasn't enough time for me to be eating.

I looked again at the table, in search of something that I could eat while on the move, but I found nothing.

Since there was no helping it, while getting on my bike, I rummaged through the refrigerator to look for something that seemed edible and stuffed it into my mouth.

"I'm offu~"

With that goodbye, I headed for the entrance, and when I looked back mom had a startled look on her face for some reason. Behind her, my brother had exploded into laughter for some reason.

"Wait a minute, why are you guys being like that....."

Mom looked like she was about to say something, but I didn't listen because there wasn't any more time left. I left the house while riding on my favorite bike from middle school. My mom seemed to be running lightly after me, and I heard her shouting after me.

"At least have something like bread in your mouth!! Why is it a cucumber!!"

While pedaling my bike, I chewed on the cucumber that was serving as a substitute for my breakfast. It's probably a cucumber straight from grandmother's field, it's so fresh and delicious, but there's still a lack of flavor from eating it raw, I'm regretting a little that I didn't get some miso as well.

While stuffing my mouth with the cucumber, and being barked at by all the dogs in the neighborhood, I somehow managed to reach school right when the bell was ringing to signify the start of homeroom.

I hurried up and got to the classroom, and it was a bit noisy still. It seems like the homeroom teacher's not here yet.

"Just barely safe."

As I said so, the teacher entered the door right behind me.

"Unfortunately, you're out."

The teacher standing on the platform was looking at me coldly.

Then – because I had broken a new record for number of times being late..... During lunch break, I was called over by my homeroom teacher, and had to listen to a lecture.

Lunch break was already half over when the lecture finally ended, while being depressed, just like that, I headed over to A-chan's classroom.

She's been my best friend since middle school, and is an otaku as well, but we were separated into different classes during our second year of high school, so visiting A-chan's class during lunch break to talk about otaku things while having lunch has become our daily routine.

At seeing me appear so much later than usual, A-chan said –

"You were late again, and got called out by the teacher, really, when will you ever be able to get to school on time?"

It seems that she knew about me being late to school and getting called out by the teacher, and she had an amazed look on her face.

"I stayed up a little late last night, so I couldn't get up in the morning."

When I gave my excuse, A-chan's face became even more amazed.

"Were you staying up all night playing games again? Please think about the proper use of time a little more."

".....Mmm, I may have gotten a little too absorbed."

After becoming a high school student, I had gotten completely addicted to the otome game genre ever since receiving one from A-chan.

Whenever I would get my hands on a new game, I would completely forget the time in my passion for gaming.

"To the point where you stayed up all night again..... Did you get a little farther in 'Fortune Lover?'"

"Fortune Lover" is an otome game that I bought recently for which I have been sacrificing my sleep time in order to desperately play it as much as I can.

"Mmm, I'm about to complete the self-important Prince Alan's route."

One of the capture targets in “Fortune Lover,” Alan is set as quite the self-important prince.

.....But, even though he’s a bit arrogant..... He’s basically very nice, and he doesn’t feel as self-important as in the game settings.

.....Huh? ...As in the game, what? .....I wonder exactly what I’m thinking about. It’s almost as if I’ve met the actual game character.....

“What’s the matter?”

I was suddenly interrupted while I was thinking by A-chan who was looking worriedly at me.

“Ah, mmm. Nothing’s the matter. Ah, I have to finish lunch quickly!”

Since I’ve already lost nearly half of my lunch break to the lecture, I’m going to have to eat as quickly as possible if I want to finish lunch at all. What’s more, my stomach’s so empty because my breakfast was only one cucumber. I opened up the lunchbox that mom prepared for me.

While finishing lunch, I had a fun time talking otaku things with A-chan like usual.

Waking up in the morning, going to school with one of mom’s lunchboxes, and happily chatting with my friends.

That’s my daily life. Even though it’s no different from usual – For some reason, I felt very nostalgic today, that I was missing something.

It would be good if these kinds of days would continue on forever. Why is it that I was thinking this way?

Then over the next few days, the otome game was proceeding smoothly. Right now I’m in the midst of capturing the evil sadistic Prince Jared.

But..... I wonder what it is. I keep feeling like something’s wrong. Especially whenever I’m playing “Fortune Lover,” the feeling gets stronger.

It's almost as if I've forgotten something important..... I keep having this strange sensation. But even so..... No matter how hard I thought about it, I couldn't remember anything.

And so, the days continued like this, until lunch break one day. I was eating lunch together with A-chan like usual.

"How's your progress with 'Fortune Lover?'"

"Right now, I'm in the midst of capturing the evil sadistic Prince Jared."

When I answered her, for some reason, A-chan made a troubled face.

For some reason, A-chan feels a little different from usual today. I can't pinpoint anything specific that seems off, but for some reason she felt more mature than usual today.

"How's school, is it fun?"

".....Eh, ah..... Mmm."

Once again, the question that A-chan asked, was a bit strange for some reason. I replied, and stared at A-chan who was different from usual for some reason.

That's, A-chan's face like it always is, the face that I've always seen since middle school..... Or it was supposed to be.....

".....EH!?"

Involuntarily, I let out a sound of surprise.

What is this, for a moment, I saw a beautiful girl with white hair and red eyes instead of A-chan there.

Such a thing..... It's so unbelievable that I rubbed my eyes over and over again, and I looked at my friend's face again. Then, I saw the face that I had always seen.

I wonder what's going on today..... Was it just my imagination.....

Staring at my friend like this while frozen solid, a very mature smile appeared on A-chan's face.

"I'm having a lot of fun. Having met you, and being able to spend time with you like this again. But..... This isn't supposed to be your world."

".....?"

This isn't my world? What on earth is A-chan talking about?

"You already have a world of your own. And, there's a lot of people waiting for you there."

".....A-chan..... Exactly what do you mean?"

At the confused me, A-chan gently smiled.

"Hey, listen, everyone is calling out for you."

".....Eh.....?"

Right after A-chan said so, I suddenly heard voices.

"Katarina, please wake up! I can't even think about a life without you anymore!"

"Wake up, nee-san! You promised that you'd always be with me forever!"

"Katarina-sama! Please wake up! I won't be able to keep working hard if you're not there!"

"Get up! How long are you planning to sleep there! You stupid girl!"

“.....Katarina, open your eyes, please.”

“.....I’m begging you. Katarina-sama, please open your eyes.”

There are all such nostalgic voices..... Voices that I had been hearing for forever.

As if some sort of fog was obstructing my memories, I had strongly felt like something was wrong. The fog that had kept blocking my memories was disappearing.

Nostalgic voices..... My stepbrother and friends..... All the people important to me..... Why is that I could have forgotten such important people to me.

The fog completely disappeared, and my memory became clear. And before I realized it, I remembered everything.

It’s just as A-chan said. With my slightly nagging but a very gentle family and my otaku best friend, and my favorite otome game, this world is very comfortable. However..... This isn’t my world anymore.

I have a new world now. A new family and friends..... There’s so many people important to me in the new world as well.

And, everyone is waiting for me there.

“I have to return to my world now. There’s a lot of people important to me waiting for me there” is what I strongly thought. Then, I heard some sort of strange popping sound in the classroom.

When I looked around me in surprise, without realizing it, all the other classmates that should have been there had disappeared.

There was only me and A-chan in the classroom. The floor was beginning to crumble and fall apart. Then, I saw a bright light in its place.



Ahh, I understand now that if I jump down here I'll be able to return to my original world.

"Ah, that's right! A-chan! When I return to my world I have to go help Maria! Since it's A-chan, do you happen to know where Maria is? Tell me!"

Since she's beaten the entire game, she should know everything.

"I know. Maria's inside the school still. There's a hidden room in the school. It's -"

A-chan told me the location in detail. As she was telling me so, the floor was falling apart more and more, and I was going to be sucked into the light.

There's no more time..... If only I had remembered sooner, there's still so much more that I wanted to talk about.

"Ahh, one more thing. Why did the student council president....."

Why did he look so pained and about to cry that time when I asked him that question. Finally, the floor around my feet was beginning to crumble as well. Along with the crumbling floor, I was about to be sucked into the light.

A-chan was looking at me with very gentle eyes.

"Since it's you, everything will definitely be alright. Just like how you saved us, you'll save the president as well. His real name is -"

"Eh? Saving? Real name?"

Being confused at hearing things I didn't understand, I asked her back, but my body had already been sucked into the light.

I could barely see A-chan's face anymore. This must be my farewell with A-chan. My best friend that's always been with me since middle school.

It's all thanks to her that I was able to become a high school student without a problem. She's helped me so, so, much. And yet..... Because of the sudden accident – I wasn't even able to tell her farewell or thank you. This is my last chance.

"A, A-chan. I'm really happy to have met you again after so long! Farewell, and thank you for everything up to now!"

I shouted at A-chan who I couldn't see anymore with all my might, I wonder if it reached her.

"I'm also really happy. Right now, I'm by your side again as Sophia. Farewell, and thank you, my important best friend."

A-chan's last words didn't reach me.

When I opened my eyes, I saw Sophia crying a river of tears before me.

And, behind her, Jared, Keith, Mary, Alan, and Nico were there as well. The people most important to me. Ahh, I've returned to my world.

Sophia hugged me when I woke up, and cried even harder. Mary who was always so calm was completely in tears as well, and also hugged me. Everyone else was looking at me with relieved expressions.

I understood very well how worried everyone had been about me.

This is my world. This world with all the people important to me. That's why – I want to protect this world and these people.

I definitely won't allow you to make such a terrible bad end!

### **33 – I said something was impossible**

When I woke up and started moving, I started stretching my creaky body. After all, I've been asleep for two full days, it seems that my body has gotten a bit slow.

After waking up I immediately went off to find the student council president, Sirius Deek, but..... I couldn't find him anywhere at school or the dorms.

Everyone said that he must have known about me waking up and escaped somewhere, but..... That's not what I thought.

He's probably still in the school somewhere, I wondered if he would be where Maria was. Why I thought so, I couldn't answer well at all, but even so I still believed it. He must be where Maria is. And Maria must still be safe.

That's why, I headed to the hidden room where Maria was in order to rescue her.

"He's the culprit who tried to steal your life, he's dangerous. We'll go find him together with the servants, so you rest here" is what everyone told me, but.....

Since I caused Maria to fall into this pinch, I have to save her with my own hands. Also..... I have to talk to Sirius properly one more time.

The way Sirius seemed right before I lost consciousness – had been strongly burned into my mind. He had such a bitter and painful expression, and he had been crying without making a sound. Even though he had such bad intentions for me..... I still can't help but worry about the way he seemed.

Also, what A-chan said at the end, about his real name – he must have some complicated circumstances, Sirius Deek.

That's why, I – have to go myself to talk to Sirius properly one more time. That's why, I myself headed to where he should be.

My friends were quite reluctant to go along with my selfishness. There was no way that I was going to be allowed to go by myself, so it was decided that everyone would go with me.

And so, together with my stepbrother and friends, we headed to where Sirius and Maria should be.

We advanced through the dim forest next to the school. In a location that's closer to the ministry of magic than the school itself, is a warehouse that's not used very often.

We opened the strangely heavy doors and entered inside. Inside it was about as large as the Claes family mansion guest room, and it was cluttered with various items that I didn't know the purpose for.

I avoided all the clutter, and headed directly for the back. Then, I reached a large bookshelf on the opposite wall from the entrance. It looks too heavy to move by myself, but just like A-chan taught me, there was a button on the side of the bookshelf. I pushed the button. Then, the heavy bookshelf slid to the right with barely any sound.

And what the bookshelf revealed, was a sturdy-looking black door.

"There really was something here!" Everyone that came along with me exclaimed in surprise. I had said that "I saw this hidden room in a dream."

At first their reactions were "what on earth are you talking about" with the way they looked at me..... I thought that I had been able to convince everyone..... It seems that everyone still had their doubts.

I placed my hand on the door that appeared. I thought that it might not be easy to open, but it opened right up when I put my hand on it. Behind the door was a room that was about the size of a dorm room.

Then, I set foot in the room. There was only one small window on the ceiling, it was quite dim inside.

I focused my eyes, and looked around the room. Then, I found a girl sitting by herself in a corner of the room. I immediately rushed over to her.

“Maria!!”

“.....Katarina-sama.....?”

There was a thin chain of some sort locked around her ankles, and while it pained me to see Maria locked up like this, upon closer inspection it seemed that Maria didn't have any serious injuries. And although her complexion didn't seem too good, she was able to properly look me in the eyes.

“.....Maria, I'm sorry for being so late.”

I hugged Maria tightly. I'm really so late in being able to help her.

“.....Me too, I'm really sorry to have inconvenienced everyone like this.....”

Maybe it's in relief or that she was really stiff, Maria lost all power in her body.

“No, you must have been thinking of doing something for my sake, I'm sure?”

Maria's somewhat troubled face slightly nodded. As expected, Maria must have noticed something on the day of the incident, and had been thinking about doing something for me.

“Thank you. Maria.”

When I said so, Maria smiled a little and her cheeks became red.

I'm really so relieved that Maria's safe, and I let go of my breath. However, I still haven't fulfilled my other objective.

“Hey, Maria..... He..... Is Sirius Deek here?”

“.....Yes. He's still here. Behind that black door.”

Her face became a little grim as she indicated to another door. It's a little hard to see, but I could just barely make out another black door in the wall.

".....Katarina-sama had been attacked by the president, you know everything now?"

"That's right..... Is what I would like to say but..... There's still a lot that I don't understand."

Thanks to A-chan's revelation, I was able to discover this hidden location, but why was he doing the things he did? How'd he get dark magic in the first place? Will he really cause such a terrible bad end like in the game..... There's so much that I don't know. However.....

".....No matter what, I can't see him as a bad person..... That's why, I want to properly talk to him one more time."

Everyone was saying "you have no sense of danger at all. You're too kind for your own good" and seemed to be troubled, but..... That's what I honestly feel right now.

".....Is that so..... Certainly..... Apart from restraining my feet like this, he didn't really do anything bad to me..... And he properly gave me food and let me move around as I liked in here..... That's why, he might not be the real villain..... But, it seems like he has some sort of mysterious power."

As expected, just like I heard from Jared, Maria is able to perceive dark magic with her own light magic.

"As expected, Maria knows something about his power?"

"Does Katarina-sama know something?"

"I heard about it, but..... I don't understand it. It's only something that someone with light magic can perceive, or so it seems..... Does Maria know something?"

When I asked that, Maria firmly nodded.

“Yes. During that incident, around those girls and the president, I could see some sort of black mist floating around them..... And... Right now, the black mist around the president..... Is even stronger than before.”

Eh!? Why, did he use dark magic on someone again!? When? For what purpose? While I was confused, Maria continued on while thinking carefully.

“.....It’s just that, the black mist I see now is different from the one I saw originally.”

“.....Different?”

“That’s right. When I looked at it before, it felt like it was there a little as well on the outside of the black mist, but..... The mist now..... Feels like it’s enveloping the president..... It almost seems like the mist is trying to devour the president or something.”

What could that mean? He can’t completely control his dark magic and that it’s now out of control?

I tilted my head because I had no idea what was going on at all, and Maria also had a troubled face that seemed like she didn’t know the answer.

But, since we’ve come this far, “since it’s dangerous, let’s go back” is something I definitely won’t say.

And, it seems that everyone understands the way I feel, my friends didn’t say anything to oppose me but, they all seem to have a reluctant atmosphere about them of “there’s no way around it.” Well, since we’ve all come this far already, they probably felt like saying anything more would be useless and have given up already.

“.....I’ll go together with you as well.”

Maria looked directly at me.

“But..... Maria had just been locked up in a place like this..... You should return first and get some rest.”

Even though she wasn't treated roughly or anything, she's still been locked up in such a dark place all this time. She should hurry up and leave here, and get her body checked. That's what I thought as I refused her, but...

“No, I'm going as well! After all, I'm the only one that can see the president's mysterious power. That's why, it's better if I come along.”

Indeed, Maria's the only person here who can perceive dark magic.

“Even if you tell me no, I'm still going!”

Like usual, there was a very strong will contained within her eyes, and as she said so Maria joined all of us around the second black door.

When we opened the door, I had expected there to be another room, but instead there were some stairs leading to a basement. It was only wide enough for one person to pass at a time, and there was barely any light, Jared used some fire magic to create some light and descended first slowly. At the bottom, there was another black door. Jared placed his hand on that black, heavy-seeming door. The door opened without a sound.

It was a room that somehow gave off a bad feeling. Even though it was about the same size as the one that had been holding Maria..... There were no windows at all and no natural light whatsoever. In that room, on the walls lit up by Jared's fire magic, there were sinister looking black letters written there. It really felt like the air down here was rather stagnant.



Also, he was standing in the middle of the room. His complexion that was lit up by the lamp he was holding, seemed even worse than the last time that I had seen him.

Standing in front of all of us that had come in, Sirius seemed so tired and looked like he was ready to give up on everything, but..... He met my eyes and opened his eyes wide.

“.....Why are you here?”

He seemed to be extremely surprised. Huh? I definitely thought that he knew I had woken up and so he was hiding here, but..... Maybe he didn't know?

“The sleeping magic has been cancelled out.”

If you don't know, I guess I'll just tell you.

“That's not it! Obviously the magic's been cancelled out! .....Meeting my eyes like this, why are you appearing in front of such a me again!”

He had a grim look on his face as he shouted.

“Ahh, that's what you meant.”

What he meant was the same as my friends, when I had decided to come here myself, giving all of them such a hard time.

But..... This is unexpected, for he himself to also say such a thing.....

Certainly, he had told me so many things full of malicious intent, and used dark magic on me. Sleeping forever until my life runs out is what he said, but.....

Well, I was able to properly wake up, and no harm was done, and it's only to the point where my body got a little creaky from sleeping too

much. What's more, I feel rather refreshed because I slept so much. Those are my honest feelings.

"I don't really think that you did anything that terrible to me."

".....You, do you not understand what I've done to you?"

Ahh, it seems that he's looking at me like I'm an idiot or something. How very regrettable.

"No, I understand it properly. You used dark magic to make me sleep, right?"

"That's right! And I was trying to take away your life!"

Sirius said so with a grim look on his face. However.....

"Mmm~. That's a lie."

".....A lie, you say....."

Sirius's expression became even darker, but I ignored it and continued on.

"I mean, if you really had intended to kill me, it would have been much easier to just kill me right there while I was asleep."

There were no witnesses at all in the garden, it was probably just the two of us, it would have been much easier to take my life there than going to all the trouble of putting me to sleep and waiting for such a long time. Even for me, who's not that smart, I noticed such a thing, there's no way that the prodigy in front of me shouldn't be able to realize that as well.

That's why, he wasn't really trying to kill me, is what I concluded.

"....."

While Sirius just stood there at a loss for what to say, I continued speaking.

"I came here because I wanted to properly talk to president one more time."

".....Talk....."

"That's right. At that time, president..... Had such a painful expression on your face..... And because you were crying....."

Honestly speaking, the words that he said at that time, I've already mostly forgotten, but..... Well, there's no way about it because I had been in such a deep dream for two days.

However..... Before I fainted, only the bitter look on Sirius's face, and the way he was crying, I couldn't forget at all. Why is it that he seemed to be in such pain..... I had always been worried about it.

".....That's why, one more time, I would like for you to hear me out....."

When I said so and looked at Sirius, his face became really distorted.

".....You hypocrite..... So what you're saying is, you're going to save me like how you've saved everyone else? Saint Katarina Claes-sama."

He spat out the words like he was being sarcastic.

Hypocrite? Save? Saint? What is he talking about, I have no idea whatsoever. Come to think of it..... A-chan said it as well during the end..... "You'll save the president as well." But.....

"That's not possible!"

While looking directly at Sirius, I flatly disagreed.

"After all, I'm not the heroine. I'm just an evil villainess rival character, there's no way I can save anyone!"

My words must have been too unexpected, since Sirius was frozen solid with his mouth wide agape.

Everyone that came along with me was raising questions like “rival character? Evil villainess?” as well.

Although I let it slip involuntarily, everyone doesn’t understand what I meant as well. They might just think that I said something weird is all.

Even so, those words were the truth. In this otome game world, I’m just one of the heroine’s rival characters, a noble girl villainess. What’s more, the other rival characters are beauties like Mary or Sophia, with strong magic and smart as well, I can’t even compare. I’m not really much of a beauty, my magic is shabby, I’m not smart, I’m such a regrettable rival character. That’s me, Katarina Claes. For such a me, being able to overcome other people’s traumas like a heroine, and healing their wounded hearts is impossible to do.

Even so, if there’s one thing that even I can do, it’s –

“Although I can’t save you from your suffering, but..... But, I can stay by your side.”

Since I’m just an evil villainess, I have no power to save others. But, I can stay by his side.

“If I’m by your side, when you’re sad, or having a hard time I can listen to you, and be together with you until you’re feeling better again.”

Suddenly remembering my memories from a previous life, and realizing that I was a villainess with only destruction flags, I’ve worked so hard every day. I’ve had hard times and painful times as well. And, everyone had always been there for me. They would be with me and listen to me until I felt better again. That’s why I was able to work hard up until now.

And by my side, are friends that are really reassuring and can do anything. Someone like me doesn’t have the power to save him but, if it’s my friends, I’m sure that they’ll be able to do something for him.

Little by little, I got closer to Sirius.

“That’s why, don’t cry by yourself.”

Almost as if a dam had broken inside, Sirius was crying painfully. I wonder exactly what he's suffering about, why is he in so much pain? Right now, I still don't understand anything.

But..... In a dark room like this, it's too sad if he has to withhold his voice and cry alone. It would just increase his pain more and more.

Then, when he reached his limit, he might really start off onto such a terrible bad end.

In order for that not to happen – In order to prevent such a bad end –

“Let's go together – Rafael.”

I reached out my hand to Sirius who was crying all over the place, and I called out his real name that I had heard from A-chan. When I called it, Sirius – Rafael, opened his tear-filled eyes wide.

Honestly, I don't really understand what it means by his real name, but..... Even so, it does seem like he has such a name as well.

Rafael nervously took my hand that I was reaching out to him.

Because his hand that touched mine was very cool to the touch, I wrapped his hand in both of mine.

“It's alright.”

To Rafael who kept crying, I smiled in order to try and cheer him up. All the while trying to make sure it didn't become a nasty villainous smile.

“The black mist is gone.....”

I didn't really understand the meaning of the words that Maria had muttered behind me, but.....

When I looked at Rafael's sopping wet eyes, they had a gentle look to them that I knew well.

### 34 – The magic was cancelled

“What’s the matter, in a place like this?”

I was being bullied by the neighborhood children, and I was hiding by the side of our house hugging my knees, and I had been secretly crying when I heard a calm voice above me.

“.....Nothing’s the matter, I’m fine.”

I didn’t want my mother who I loved so much to worry about me, so I told a lie and hurriedly wiped away my tears, but.....

“If you’re crying by yourself in a place like this, your painful feelings definitely won’t go away. When it’s painful, mother will be by your side, and listen to what you have to say, so don’t cry by yourself.”

Mother hugged me tightly as she said so.

When I was growing up, it was only mother and I living together.

Mother would still hold me even while working, even though it should have been really hard on her, she always had a smile on. We weren’t well-off in our lifestyle or anything, but..... “I’m so lucky to have such a wonderful son” is what mother would say as she hugged me, giving me lots of love. Those were peaceful and happy days.

I didn’t know anything about my father. His name, or whether he was alive or not. Because of that, I kept getting bullied by the children in the neighborhood, and it would be a lie to say that I didn’t care about it, but..... Somehow it felt like mother was really reluctant to talk about father, I could feel so even as a child, and I didn’t probe too deeply.

However, I would soon regret that. If I had known about my father..... I might have been able to change what happened.

And so, the peaceful, happy daily life I had with my mother came to a sudden end. That happened during spring when I was nine years old.

It happened during dusk, when I was returning home with my mother. I think some big men that we've never seen before suddenly appeared in front of us, and – a cloth was pressed against my mouth, and I inhaled a sweet smell..... I went unconscious after that.

When I woke up I was in a dimly lit room. There was no natural light at all, there was only one lamp lighting the room. From what I could make out on the walls, there were tightly packed letters of some sort written on them, and it gave off an incredibly creepy feeling.

There were ten or so people next to me in that room.

I was lying down in the middle of the room, and they were standing around me as if to surround me. The men who attacked us were among them as well. They were probably the ones who brought me here.

I was tied up, and I tried to move but couldn't budge at all. There was also a cloth tightly packed into my mouth, and I couldn't make any sounds.

Standing right in front of me, were a man dressed in all black that seemed to fit right in with this dark room somehow, and a woman in all red with a sparkling crimson dress and a gem around her neck with the same crimson color.

"Child, you've awoken. Now, bring that boy here."

When the woman in red said so, a large man came forth. Under his arm, he was holding a boy about the same age as me.

The boy was laid down next to me on a clean cloth very carefully. Looking at him closely, he seemed to be overly skinny, and his complexion was bad as well, and it looked like he was having difficulties breathing. He's probably very sick with something.

However, other than the fact that he was very ill, he looked quite like me. Red hair, grey eyes, and his face as well –

I wonder who exactly this boy is. Then, while I was still observing the boy, the woman in red spoke up again.

“Now everything is ready. Then, let’s begin the sacrifice.”

What’s ready? What exactly are they doing in such a dark room? What’s a sacrifice? I think I’ve heard the word in a story mother read to me once..... I wonder what it was.....

I still hadn’t realized the situation I was in and was still thinking things like that.

The boy was brought opposite to me, then the man brought out another person.

That person was..... the mother that I loved so much. Almost as if she was being dragged, she was brought over here. Her beautiful face was swollen up. She also had an injury of some sort on her leg, she was limping.

“Mother!!”

I shouted with all my might through the cloth stuffed in my mouth, but in actuality only a muffled sound made it out.

Mother was struggling. However, a man standing close to me pushed her down onto the cold floor.

“Stop!!”

Mother was screaming, and pushing back against the man.

While staring at us with very cold eyes, the woman in red spoke up.

“Take care to not treat that boy’s body too badly. After all, his body’s going to become my precious Sirius’s body.”



She's probably talking about me when she said that boy. My body's going to become Sirius's body? Who's Sirius? I was confused and didn't understand what was going on at all.

".....Marchioness, if you hate me, it doesn't matter what you do to me..... So please, I'm begging you, please spare my son....."

My injured mother was desperately begging the woman in red. Mother was calling her marchioness. I wonder if she knows her?

Also..... I wonder what mother meant by hating her.

Mother wasn't only gentle towards me, she was nice to everyone in the neighborhood and was liked by everyone as well. I can't even imagine anyone hating my mother.

However, the woman in red's eyes became even colder as she looked at mother.

".....I'm amazed at how impudent you can be. You stole my husband from me, and even had a child, yet you're still begging me."

".....I was only the marquis-sama's partner due to a momentary whim of his. That's why, I have no intentions of getting close to the marquis-sama. I only want to live a peaceful life together with my son."

"Smack!" A sound loudly resounded throughout the dark room. The woman in red had slapped my begging mother on her cheek. "Mother!!" I tried but failed again to shout out.

".....Even though they're both Marquis Deek's children, born at almost the same time..... Why are you and I so different. ....You're beautiful, and have a healthy body. And, your son is healthy and energetic as well..... Why do you have everything? .....I don't have anything, I'm not that beautiful, I have a weak and sickly body, my husband doesn't love me, and even though I was finally able to give birth to a child, he's

just as weak and sickly as I am, and what's more he caught an incurable disease, and doesn't have long to live....."

The woman in red grabbed and shook my mother.

".....Only you..... I definitely won't allow you and your child to live a happy life!! .....Begin!"

At the woman in red's command, the man dressed entirely in black walked in front of my mother. Then, in a voice that sounded almost completely emotionless, he began muttering words I've never heard before.

They were such mysterious words. Even though they're probably a foreign language that I've never heard before, when I heard them they felt nostalgic to me somehow.

However, as the man in black continued speaking, I began to get goosebumps all over my body. The air felt incredibly stagnant, and something felt really bad.

Then – the man stopped speaking. And then, the already dark room was completely enveloped in darkness.

In this darkness where I couldn't see anything, I could hear my mother screaming.

When light appeared in the completely dark room again, I immediately looked for my mother. Then, just two or three steps away from me, I saw her laying there limp on the ground.

Even with my tied up body, I desperately tried to reach my mother. As I got closer, I saw that mother's face had no life to it at all, and it didn't seem like she was breathing.

Although she had been injured, it didn't seem to be something serious to this extent. Why? What's the matter?

“Mother! Mother!” I desperately tried shouting for her through the cloth in my mouth.

Then, I met my mother’s eyes. Mother looked firmly into my eyes.

“— — Please — —”

She said so in a voice that was so quiet it could barely be heard, and then she became quiet and stopped breathing.

“Well? Did it succeed?”

“Yes. Just like how it’s written in the book, he successfully obtained the power without any problems.”

The man in black was answering the woman in red’s question.

“I see. Then, let’s immediately use that power to transfer Sirius’s consciousness to this boy’s body.”

I heard what they were talking about, but..... Right now, nothing was entering my head. I can’t accept what’s happened here right now at all.

Just a bit earlier, I had been making dinner plans with mother on our way home.....

And before I realized it, I was brought to this dark room for some reason..... And..... mother whom I loved so much..... wasn’t breathing anymore.....

“Okay. Well, I’m starting.”

While also touching the body of the boy laying next to me, the man in black placed his hand on my forehead.

At that instant, my head was filled with images that I had never seen before. Strange images that even included sound as well. People and places I didn’t know..... Almost as if it was a life that had been

experienced by someone else, is the feeling I got. These images kept entering my head one after the other, and my head hurt so much it felt like it would crack open.

Then – when all the images finally stopped coming..... I finally understood everything. Why I was brought to a place like this, and why my mother died in a dark room like this.....

The images that came into my mind told me everything. This redheaded woman's plan –

The redheaded woman is the wife of a noble called Marquis Deek, and she's the mother of the boy named Sirius laying next to me.

However, she wasn't loved by the marquis. The marquis was a feckless womanizer playboy, and his ways didn't change even after marrying. When he fulfilled his duty of siring an heir, Sirius Deek, upon his lawful wife, he never showed himself in front of her again.

Because of that, she only had one child, Sirius, and her whole existence revolved around him. Every day, she would bitterly complain about her misfortune to her young son.

However, the only support for her heart, her son..... came down with an incurable disease.

She made full use of their wealth and political power, and had so many doctors visit, but they all told her it was useless so then she tried some dubious magic, but.....

She wasn't able to cure her son, and he got weaker every day. The idea of losing her son..... She couldn't accept the thought at all.

One day, after dabbling in so many different types of dubious magic, she finally found out about the existence of dark magic. Magic that can manipulate the heart and mind, and even replace memories.

When she learned this, she came up with an idea. If she could transfer her son's mind to another healthy body, it might be a way to save her son.

It was an exceedingly quixotic plan, a thoughtless plan that could almost never be realized – but, since she didn't have any ideas left anymore that could save her son..... Even though this plan was such an impossible plan, it was all she could cling to in order to try saving her son.

And so, she searched for the way to obtain dark magic – and also for a suitable vessel for her son.

Her son's vessel must be in good health, and, it was necessary that he be as close to her son as possible in age and looks. If it looked too different, he wouldn't be able to inherit from Marquis Deek.

Then, she found it. A boy that looked very similar to her son and was the same age – almost as if he had been born just to become Sirius's vessel –

That boy was the son of one of Marquis Deek's former maids. In the past, this beautiful maid had worked for Marquis Deek and was favored by him, and she disappeared from the mansion when she had gotten pregnant.

The maid had given birth to a son who looked much like Marquis Deek and they were living together happily.

The marchioness decided that the maid's son would become a vessel for her son Sirius.

Then, she succeeded in finding out the way to obtain dark magic powers. Dark magic can be acquired by sacrificing another's life. Meaning, it was necessary to make a living sacrifice in order to obtain dark magic.

The marchioness decided to sacrifice the vessel's mother, that woman who seemed like she was living such a happy life.

And so, today was the day she finally put that plan into action.

She had the vessel and the woman who was to be the sacrifice captured, and had an underling who had dark magic perform the sacrificial ritual to obtain dark magic on the vessel – then, she had her son Sirius's memories transferred to the vessel.

If everything had gone according to the marchioness's plan, Sirius's memories should have been transferred over to me who was to be a vessel, and I should have died..... I was supposed to have become Sirius Deek, but.....

However..... Sirius's memories – even though I had memories of everything he's seen and heard before inserted into my head..... I'm still me.

Certainly, I now have Sirius's memories in my head. But that's all. Even though I have the memories – the boy named Sirius is nowhere to be found. However, all I could feel was "I'm so tired. I wish it could all just end," nothing but painful feelings.

He had been everything to his mother, his mother completely relied on him mentally, even more so when he was on the verge of death, and she would always be crying by his bedside, but..... All the boy Sirius wanted was to be free from it all. Even though he was so young, he had already gotten tired of living. He had no other feelings at all in his memories.

And so, I didn't become Sirius, I just obtained his memories without any of his thoughts.

The marchioness's plan had failed.

.....However, if she learns the truth, I'll probably be killed here immediately, so I'll use Sirius's memories.

I can't die here..... It's the strongest feeling I've ever had. I can't die yet..... Not until I fulfill my mother's last wish.....

Before I realized it, the cloth that had been tightly packed into my mouth had been removed.

I suppressed all of my feelings, and greeted the woman I hate most in the world –

“.....Mother.....”

That's what I called her. That's how Sirius Deek has always addressed her. Then, a big smile appeared on her face.

“Ahh, Sirius! It's you! The dark magic succeeded!”

As she said so, Marchioness Deek hugged me tightly.

I felt strongly repulsed, but I endured the best I could in order to prevent my body from shaking. Because, I can't afford to die here just yet. I'll live on, in order to fulfill my mother's last wish.

“.....Well then, Madam. My job here is finished. Would it be alright for me to return to my hometown together with my family now?”

The man in black asked the marchioness nervously.

“That's right, you've done very well. Thanks to you, my Sirius was able to obtain such a healthy body.”

“.....Then, would it be alright for you to return my family now?”

“Yes, of course. I'll let you meet them immediately. You guys!”

The marchioness beckoned towards the other strong-looking men in the room. A relieved expression appeared on the man in black's face, and the other men approached. Then – all of them stabbed the man in black with their swords.

“.....Why.....”

With his body pierced and bleeding all over, the man reached his hand out towards the marchioness.

“Didn't I just say I'd let you meet them immediately? Your family's already dead, and waiting for you in the next world.”

The marchioness was laughing gracefully at him.

“.....You promised you would return my family safely to me if I helped you..... Even though I did so much for you..... You..... deceived me.....”

“There was no helping it, it was the only way I could get someone with a forbidden magic to help me. But, in order for everything to end safely, I can't let you who has such a dangerous power like dark magic just simply return home.”

To the marchioness who was smiling at the man in black as if to say it should have been obvious, he had a frightful glare.

“.....Curses, curses..... I'll never forgive you..... I swear I'll take your social statuses and power away from you all..... I'll definitely cast you all down to hell.....”

The hand he had stretched out touched my foot slightly.

“What's all this from a person who's about to die. You guys, hurry up and finish him off.”

And so, swords pierced the man in black even deeper than last time..... And he died.



Also, at the same time, the real Sirius Deek passed away on the cold floor.

And so, I began living as Sirius Deek.

I'll live as Sirius Deek for now, and I swore that I would definitely take my revenge on the Deek family that treated me as nothing but a tool and stole my mother's life away from me.

It was after I had already lived as Sirius Deek for some time when I noticed my mysterious powers. I was able to see into people's hearts and minds, and manipulate them as well. That was the power of dark magic. Honestly, I didn't know why I had this power at all, but since it's very useful, I'm more than happy to have it.

And so, I lived only for revenge, and as time passed, I met her.

She said the same thing as my mother that I loved so much, and even had a gentle smile that was so much like my mother, Katarina Claes.

After meeting her, my heart became greatly shaken.

That's why, I decided to get rid of Katarina. I used an eternal sleep dark magic spell on her, and planned to take away her life.

.....However, the magic that should have been impossible to dispel was cancelled.

When I came to see how Maria was doing in the secret room, I learned about the magic being cancelled from her.

Even though it was a situation where I should have been extremely agitated, I was very relieved for some reason. The magic on Katarina was cancelled, with this she'll be saved. That's great, is what I thought.

And, if Katarina's awake now, everyone probably knows about me now..... If that's the case they'll be coming to capture me.

"You can't let yourself be captured here! In order to fulfill our revenge, you have to run away!" The other me was insisting with all his might, but.....

At this point, if I'm caught and everything ends, that'll be fine, is what I thought.

"Did you forget your mother's last words?" The other me used that on me again, and my feelings wavered a little.....

"Please take revenge....." Mother's last words – I had always been living on in order to fulfill my mother's last request.

But..... I'm already so tired. I don't want to hurt anyone anymore.

If the information about me is told to the school officials, the knowledge of this secret room that the Deek family is hiding will probably be exposed as well.

At first this secret room had been created at magic school hidden away in the forest in order to research dubious magics in order to save Sirius's life, and after that it became a place to research dark magic.

The place where my mother's life was stolen, and where my identity was killed. If this is where everything will end..... It might just be fate.

That's why, I'll just wait in this secret room. For my destruction to come –

They came faster for me than I thought they would.

I was able to sense that people had entered the room where Maria had been locked up. Since the room I'm in is in the basement and there's a thick door as well as a passage of stairs between the rooms, I wasn't able to tell exactly what was going on, but I knew that people had entered.

Finally, they've saved Maria, and the school officials that have come to capture me have arrived.

The other me was saying "you can still escape! Use dark magic on everyone!" and kept shouting at me, but..... I just quietly waited for everything to end.

And so, I heard the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs, and the door to this room opened.

I had thought that it would be armed school officials who entered the door, but when I recognized the person who had come in, I involuntarily froze up.

I had already predicted that the student council members such as Jared Stuart and Keith Claes might come. They idolized her so much, and it would be natural that they would want to capture me who had tried to take away her life with their own hands.

However..... I kept staring at the person in front of me. Why is this person here right now, I had no idea whatsoever.

Even though I said such malicious things right to her face, and tried to take away her life with magic..... Why is she appearing in front of me again.....

".....Why are you here?"

She answered my question absentmindedly.

"The sleeping magic has been cancelled out."

Without any change in her attitude at all, Katarina was in front of me.

It can't be, did she forget the things I did to her in the garden.....

"That's not it! Obviously the magic's been cancelled out! .....Meeting my eyes like this, why are you appearing in front of such a me again!"

"Ahh, that's what you meant. I don't really think that you did anything that terrible to me."

Just like usual, Katarina was talking like it was nothing. Even though I had tried to kill her, what on earth does she mean.

Is she just that naturally optimistic and stupid, or does she have such a forgiving heart like a saint. Or is it simply that –

".....You, do you not understand what I've done to you?"

When I asked her, Katarina replied with –

"No, I understand it properly. You used dark magic to make me sleep, right?"

She answered with something obvious.

"That's right! And I was trying to take away your life!"

Since Katarina has a hard time comprehending things, I said it directly, but.....

"Mmm~. That's a lie."

".....A lie, you say....."

"I mean, if you had really intended to kill me, it would have been much easier to just kill me right there while I was asleep."

"....."

At Katarina who still hadn't changed and was saying stuff as if it should be obvious..... I was completely lost for words.

.....Indeed, it's as Katarina says. At that time, rather than going through all the trouble of using sleeping dark magic, it would have been much easier to just kill her right there.

But..... I didn't do that..... No, I couldn't do it. I, I'm actually –

“I came here because I wanted to properly talk to president one more time.”

“.....Talk.....”

Exactly what is this girl saying.....

“That's right. At that time, president..... Had such a painful expression on your face..... And because you were crying..... That's why, one more time, I would like for you to hear me out.....”

Her light blue eyes were looking directly at me. I felt a pain in my chest, and I had difficulty breathing. My heart was in a mess.

“.....You hypocrite..... So what you're saying is, you're going to save me like how you've saved everyone else? Saint Katarina Claes-sama.”

Before I realized it, I had already said those things involuntarily.

Even though she knows nothing about me..... What could a girl who's grown up so happily in a wealthy duke's family know about me.

If Katarina Claes says “I'll save you” right here and now..... I'll definitely scorn the hubris of the noble girl who was so favored with fortune and raised so preciously.

However..... Katarina said the exact opposite of what I thought she would.

“That's not possible!”

Katarina was looking directly at me.

“After all, I’m not the heroine. I’m just an evil villainess rival character, there’s no way I can save anyone!”

It can’t be, to be saying it’s “not possible” so clearly.....

I have no idea about anything Katarina Claes is thinking at all. I just stared at the girl in front of me in a daze. Then –

“Although I can’t save you from your suffering, but..... But, I can stay by your side.”

Katarina smiled at me gently as she said so.

“If I’m by your side, when you’re sad, or having a hard time I can listen to you, and be together with you until you’re feeling better again.

That’s the same as what my mother would tell me. I didn’t want her to worry so I hid while crying by myself, that’s what mother said as she hugged me.

At Katarina’s words, when I remembered this, something burst in my head. It felt like as if a mist had lifted and everything was clear in my head again.

In truth, I had always had some doubts. For “please, take revenge” to have been my mother’s last words..... I had wondered if my gentle mother who was always worried about me more than herself had really left those words.

And now, I can clearly remember it. Mother didn’t leave that as her last words –

That’s right. Why did I make a mistake like this? My mother’s true last dying words were –

“.....Please... Live, survive, be happy..... I love you.....”

That's right, my mother would never want something like revenge. In her final moments, my mother had wished for me to live on and be happy. That's why I had thought that I must survive at any cost.

Before I realized it, Katarina had gotten close to me.

"That's why, don't cry by yourself."

Katarina smiled gently and reached her hand out to me. For some reason, I had trouble seeing. My cheeks were also wet.

"Let's go together – Rafael."

Rafael, that's my real name. The important, important name that my mother gave me.

I took the hand that was proffered to me..... Then.....

"Oi, what are you doing. Don't listen to anything this bastard tells you! What's more, be on your guard and don't get close to her. At this rate, if you take her hostage and escape, you'll still be able to run!" The other me in my head was yelling angrily at me.

I answered the other me.

"I won't do something like that. I don't want something like revenge anymore!"

".....W, what!"

To the other me who seemed daunted, I asked a question.

"Anyways, who are you?"

I had always agreed with the other me who talked of nothing but revenge up until now. He was also the one who had told me my mother's last words.

However..... Mother's last words that I had heard from him had been a lie. This guy was deceiving me and trying to use me. The other me had twisted my mother's final words in order to goad me into seeking revenge. I've finally noticed. This person isn't me.

When I was certain of this, the other person that I had always thought was also me, finally revealed his true form.

The other me..... That I had thought was me..... This person was – a man dressed entirely in black..... The man in black who brought death to my mother on that day.....

“.....So you've realized it.....”

The man in black smiled sardonically.

“.....You've been manipulating me all this time by pretending to be me.”

On that day, this man had touched me before he died. At that time, he must have used dark magic on me, in order to plant his own consciousness within mine and manipulate me. And, he twisted my memory of my mother's last words.

“I was only lending you a hand to help you fulfill your own wish.”

The man in black spoke with great venom.

“.....Indeed, I also hate those guys very much. ....But, I didn't survive for the purpose of something like revenge! I survived in order to become happy!”

That's right, my mother's last wish – was for me to survive in order to become happy.

.....That's why, I have to erase the existence of this man.

The girl in front of me has overturned everything with a lack of common sense that defies even dark magic.

“It's alright.”



Katarina's warm hands enveloped mine.

I looked at the man in black in my mind, and strongly said "I'm done with revenge. Your existence isn't necessary anymore."

"Damnit..... Who do you think it was that helped your weakling self up to this point..... You traitor....."

As he spat that out at me..... The man in black disappeared.

When I raised my face, I saw Katarina smiling gently at me.

### **Side story 7 - About the engagement**

I, Alan Stuart, called out my fiancée Mary Hunt today in order to talk with her about our engagement.

We were in a dorm room, and nobody else was here. I intended to finally have a conversation with Mary about that.

It's been a month since the dark magic incident that Katarina Claes got involved in. At one point in time I had been troubled by thinking about what I could do for her, but the incident was resolved with everyone returning safely. As for the main culprit behind the incident, Sirius, or Rafael, he's left school, and there was a bit of commotion about the student council, but things were still going on as usual even so.

During all that, there's something that I absolutely have to do.

When I, Alan Stuart, was eight years old, I got engaged to Mary Hunt, the fourth daughter of Marquis Hunt. She was lovely, and I thought that it would be alright if I spent the rest of my life with her, but.....

However, I realized that no matter what, I had no romantic feelings for her whatsoever.

I got my hint during the incident when Katarina seemed like she might lose her life. At that time, when I thought that Katarina might lose her life, I noticed my true feelings.

I'm in love with the girl known as Katarina Claes.

When I realized this, my feelings suddenly overflowed, and I couldn't stop them at all. I wanted to be by her side even if just a little, and always see her smile.

I know very well that she's the fiancée of my brother Jared. That's why, even if my wish can't come true..... I wanted to stay as close by to her side as limits would allow.

And so, when I was busy thinking such things, I thought about Mary. Certainly, I like her well enough, but, it's more like a familial love for a little sister rather than romantic feelings for her.

Familial love, while she certainly might not mind, but..... So that I'm not being disrespectful to Mary.....

Since it's like this, it might be better if she gets engaged with a different man that she loves instead, is what I thought.

I kept being troubled and troubled by my thoughts until finally, I decided to make my intentions clear to Mary. I'm not in love with Mary, and the girl of my dreams is someone else instead.

And so, I decided to meet with Mary and tell her this. I'll leave it up to her what to do about our engagement.....

And so, Mary finally arrived. My lovely fiancée had a puzzled look on her face wondering what I called her out for just as I expected.

To Mary, I..... told her everything that I had been thinking about, except that I left out Katarina's name.

“Mary, I’m really sorry to have done something like this to you. That’s why, if you want, you can discard this engagement right now so that you’re not troubled by someone like me.”

At first, Mary had a really surprised look on her face, but then her expression became somewhat troubled as well. Then.....

“.....You were more serious than I thought. How troublesome.”

“Eh, what?”

Although Mary muttered something, it was too soft for me to hear, so I asked her to say it again. Mary just laughed and said “it’s nothing” while smiling gently. Then –

“I understand Prince Alan’s feelings very well now..... But, if I discard this engagement now, my family will probably find another fiancé for me immediately. I’d be troubled if that happens.”

“You’ll be troubled if you get a different fiancé? You’re very popular in our social circles, wouldn’t you definitely be able to find a wonderful fiancé that can love you?”

In truth, Mary is very popular in society, and there would be no shortage of suitors for her hand if she discarded her engagement with me. However, Mary shook her head with a grim look on her face.

“No. What I meant by troubled was..... Prince Alan, I’ve always kept quiet about something as well, it’s..... In truth, I also have someone that I’m deeply in love with as well.”

“EH!?”

The development was too sudden for me, I opened my mouth wide and froze solid.

“I’m really very sorry about keeping quiet all this time. ....But, the love I have for that person won’t reach them.”

“.....Is that so. So you were like that as well.”

So that was it. Unbelievable, for Mary as well..... She had a person in mind as well. What a dense guy I am, to have never noticed all this time.

“.....But, I won't give up..... My chances aren't good, but I'll try my very best. That's why, rather than getting engaged to a new fiancé, I'd rather keep this engagement with Prince Alan who feels the same way I do. That's why, let's please stay engaged just like this.”

As she said so, Mary was looking at me with slightly wet eyes. When Mary who seemed ephemeral was asking me like this, I found it impossible to decline her request.

“I understand. Until the time when you succeed with that person, I'll continue being your fiancé.”

When I said that to Mary, she smiled so happily.

That smiling lovely girl, was actually our biggest rival, and what's more the strongest enemy, was something I would only realize later and a story for another time.

### **35 – The graduation ceremony has arrived**

Sirius Deek, his real name was Rafael Walt. It seems that he was the son of one of the maids that had worked for Marquis Deek, he told us everything.

How he was raised, and why he was living as Sirius Deek. How he acquired dark magic.

And how, he's always been manipulated as well by dark magic for seven years.

Listening to his story, rather than staying angry at him for being the culprit, everyone's feelings changed.

Setting the original issue of attacking me aside, Maria seems to also have decided to forgive his crime of having locked her up for a few days. Especially since because, it seems that Maria was able to see the instant when the dark magic lost its hold on Rafael, so she had an easier time believing his story.

However, Rafael decided to turn himself in to the school officials anyway.

“I have to tell them properly myself. The things that happened to me and my mother..... About the man in black..... And about the real Sirius as well..... And about the manipulation..... I’ll properly tell them about the things I’ve done as well.”

After Rafael said so, he headed off to meet with the school officials to tell them about Marchioness Deek and her minions’ crimes, as well as his own crimes.

And then, a bit later, rumors about how Marchioness Deek and her underlings were arrested began spreading.

Only the part about forbidden magic was left out, and not public information but, they’ll probably still have to pay for their crimes in some way.

However, there were no rumors about Rafael whatsoever, where he’s been after he went to the school officials and how he’s doing, I have no idea at all, and I’m very worried.

And so, a few months later, it’s now almost time for the graduation ceremony.

Since the graduation ceremony is upon us, the student council members are all really busy. So, in order to not get in everyone’s way, I’ll work in my field to the point where I become a spirit of the fields, and I was on the way to my dorm room to pick up my tools.

“Katarina Claes-sama.”

I looked back when I heard a voice that seemed familiar for some reason. There was a boy with inconspicuous auburn hair standing there, wearing a uniform similar to what people from the ministry of magic always wore. Everything about his atmosphere felt very ordinary, and if he hadn't raised his voice I probably wouldn't even have noticed his presence, he left no impression at all.

Huh? Who's this? When I heard the voice I thought that it would be someone I knew..... But I can't remember him.

As I was thinking this, I looked into the boy's eyes. They were gentle grey eyes that I knew quite well.

“It can't be..... Rafael?”

I thought it couldn't be possible, and asked in a daze. The boy, or Rafael, opened his eyes wide.

“You knew really well. Even though I've changed my appearance so much.”

Ahh, it really was Rafael.

Even though his appearance was completely different from a few months ago, but his gentle grey eyes were the same as always. When I told him so, Rafael smiled a bit shyly.

I haven't seen his smile in so long.

“You're coming back?”

Since he's here all by himself, I wonder if that means he's coming back to school.

“Yes. Since everyone has testified so much in my favor, I’m finally able to come back to school.”

We tried our best to do everything we could for him, with the things he’s experienced, and what Maria saw, and how gentle he’s been, and we used all of our connections to appeal to the higher-ups. It’ll be good if it was any help at all.

But anyways, he looks so different from the way he was before, I’m really surprised. I wonder why he changed his appearance so much.....

“Could it be, that you’re going to enter school again as a new student under a different identity?”

After that incident, he just straight up left the school immediately. Although it was ostensibly in order to “receive treatment for a medical condition,” there were already rumors in society floating around that Marchioness Deek had been arrested, and that her son Sirius must have gotten involved in some incident as well. That’s why, it would probably be hard for him to keep pretending to be Sirius and attend school.

However, if he completely changes his appearance like this, it would be possible for him to enroll in school as a different person. Although, that’s just what I think.

“Nope, I’m not going to return as a student. Although, it is a bit of a pity that I wasn’t able to graduate properly. I’m going to be working for the ministry of magic from now on. As Rafael Walt.”

Rafael was able to dispel the dark magic affecting him on his own, but at the same time, he lost his own ability to use dark magic.

But even so, Rafael Walt himself has really powerful magic as well. It seems that his magic has been evaluated, and that he’s gotten a job working for the ministry of magic.

Well, there’s also the incident where he obtained dark magic powers temporarily against his will, so that’s why he felt it would be better to entrust himself to the ministry of magic, is what he told me.

Because of that incident, for the time being he'll be working for the ministry of magic's facilities at this school. In order for the students to not find out and cause a fuss, that's why he's changed his appearance.

It's just about impossible to tell that he's the same person as before, he must have been helped with his disguise by the work of a pro or something. If you're wondering just how good the work of a pro is..... The disguise is quite high level, where even the shape of his face has been changed. As expected of the work of a pro. Until everything's settled down a bit, it seems that he'll remain in this form.

"Then, we'll be able to meet like this again, right?"

"That's right. Since we'll both be here."

"Hehe. Then, if we get the chance, will you make that delicious tea for me once more?"

"Yes. Happily."

As he said so and laughed, Rafael suddenly and unexpectedly knelt before me and held out his hand. This is the exact same pose that Jared had when he proposed to me so long ago.

Eh, huh? What's going on? I had no idea what was going on and was confused.

"Katarina Claes-sama, once again, I'll be in your care. I, Rafael Walt, wish to stay by your side. Would you please give me permission to stay by your side?"

"Of course. I'll be in your care from now on as well."

I laughed and took his outstretched hand.

"Ah, that's why, uhh..... Please, you don't have to call me '-sama,' and I would like it if you called me as you always had before."

When I said so, Rafael laughed with a bit of a troubled look.



★★★★★★

Finally..... Finally, the time has come.

Our second-year senpais will be having their graduation ceremony tomorrow night, and I was clenching my fists tightly alone in my dorm room.

It's finally come. The final event in the otome game "Fortune Lover," the graduation ceremony.....

The otome game where the heroine is surrounded by nothing but nobles will end after one year of her studying magic at school and having love stories with her fellow students when her senpais finally finish school and have their graduation ceremony.

During the graduation ceremony, the heroine will officially be with someone from the capture targets, or even be with everyone if she was on the reverse harem route.

I somehow survived the Katarina Claes condemnation event, but I can't relax my guard until the game finally ends.

Honestly, everyone's completely become my important friends, and I can't imagine that they'd exile me to another country by myself, or do something like take my life away, but..... I have to be careful until the very end.

I've had Tom-san's masterpiece, the toy snake, prepared and stored in my dress pocket.

And just in case that I get exiled, I've prepared my own hoe, work clothes, and books on agriculture so that I'm always ready at a moment's notice.

My sword skills have been evaluated that my swings are good. I'm also able to perfectly throw the toy snake quickly. Thanks to Mary who has a green thumb helping me, I can also properly raise vegetables now without having them die. And every day, I keep plowing my field with the hoe.

It's finally time to test the fruits of my efforts all this time ever since I recovered my memories eight years ago.

Come if you dare, destruction flags!! I'll show you the culmination of eight years of effort! Katarina Claes shall be your opponent!

I raised my clenched fists to the ceiling.

And so, while I was burning up with fighting spirit, I heard a knock on the door and Anne entered.

"Ojou-sama. You said that you would prepare a congratulatory bouquet for Nico for tomorrow, have you prepared it properly yet?"

Anne asked me as she looked at me dubiously because I had my fists raised to the ceiling.

There's a custom at this school to give the graduating seniors that have taken care of you a gift of some kind. Well, that's similar to my school in the previous world.

As for the congratulatory gift, flower bouquets are the most popular item. Some people also spend a lot of money on items like expensive accessories, but mostly only if they have a special relationship of some kind.

That's why, I was also going to use a flower bouquet, but...

Then, I started thinking.

The devilish earl Nico, is extremely popular. It even seems that it's to the point where he has something like a fan club. If so, Nico would probably receive a mountain of bouquets. In that case..... wouldn't it be better if I didn't give him a bouquet?

In the first place, it would probably be pretty difficult to take care of that many flower bouquets, and honestly, I'm not very good at decorating a flower bouquet.

That's why, I'll specially prepare something else for him.

And so, I showed the item I specially prepared to Anne. It was beautifully wrapped and it looked like a bouquet at first glance, but when you look at it more carefully you can tell that it's not a bouquet.

"How is it, surely it's ground-breaking!"

" ....."

It's really such a wonderful idea I had. I'm so wonderful.

Well, I've prepared the perfect gift for Nico now! My anti-destruction flag countermeasures are complete as well!

".....Um, ojou-sama, what exactly is this....."

Tomorrow's finally the final battle!

".....Um, ojou-sama? Are you listening to me?"

I raised my fists as high as I could towards the ceiling once more!

And so, this is how the night before the final battle went.

★★★★★★★★

The graduation ceremony began with the same feeling as the entrance ceremony.

The representative responsible for giving a speech for the graduating class was Nico. It should have been Sirius Deek's role originally, but there was no way about it since he wasn't a student here anymore.

At Nico's speech, regardless of gender or age, many people's faces started blushing, or sighing sweetly, having been completely enraptured by Nico. His devilish charm is really so frightful.

Jared was the representative giving the speech for the first-year students. By the way, it also seems that he'll be the student council president for next year.

Jared's speech as well, caused a lot of girls to sigh and turn red. As expected of a good-looking orthodox prince.

And so, while listening to all the girls around me sighing, the ceremony ended without incident.

And so, it's finally time, the critical moment of the otome game, the ending event. The graduation party.

After the ceremony was over, everyone would gather in the school courtyard, and a buffet party would begin.

During this graduation party, the heroine and her capture target of choice would secretly leave the party..... And, the capture target would confess his passionate love for the heroine.

Therefore, I'm going to carefully watch Maria's movements, meaning whoever Maria calls out will decide which ending it is. And so, I stuck to Maria much more closely than usual.

However, I can't only stick close to Maria. After all, this is the graduation party. I have to properly say my congratulations to the seniors.

For the time being, I headed for Nico who was the person I had to congratulate first together with Maria.

When we arrived, Nico already had a large amount of bouquets on hand. There were even more bouquets placed in a bag next to him.

This is more than I would have thought. While being taken aback by the amount of bouquets, I congratulated Nico together with Maria.

And so, Maria presented her flowers to Nico first. The bouquet that Maria had prepared, wasn't expensive but was a nice and lovely bouquet that seemed just like something Maria would prepare.

After her, I also presented the special item I had prepared to Nico.

At first glance, it appeared to be a flower bouquet, and I received a smile from Nico that one only sees so rarely, but..... After checking what was inside, he just completely froze up.

Maybe he was suspicious at the way Nico seemed, Alan who was close by peeked into the bouquet as well.

"Oi, what's the matter..... I mean, what is this!? Grass!?"

Alan's voice was so loud, that Jared and Keith came over as well. Offended, I responded to Alan's remark as well.

"How rude! It's definitely not anything like grass! They're vegetables!"

".....Vegetables?"

Alan made a dubious look, and looked again at what was in Nico's hand. Nico also confirmed what he was really holding.

A little behind them, Jared and Keith were trying to see what it was as well.

“I thought that you’d be troubled if you only got flower bouquets, so I picked some vegetables from my field and wrapped them up for you. This way, you won’t have to just throw a decorative item away, and I think it’ll be practical since you can fill your stomach.”

It’s not a flower bouquet, it’s called a vegetable bundle instead!

During this season, my field doesn’t have a wide variety of vegetables, since I made green vegetables such as leeks and onions the centerpiece, certainly it might seem a bit like grass at first, but it’s different from a flower bouquet, and is really excellent if you look at it with your stomach.

Ahh, what a wonderful idea it was! I was in love with the wonder of my idea, and kept praising myself. However.....

“.....Uh, no matter how you look at it, it’s grass..... I mean, calling it vegetables..... Bwa-...”

For some reason, Alan exploded into laughter. I wonder what’s so funny. How rude.

Nico who had finally melted from his frozen state said “thank you. I’ll treasure it as I eat it,” and Maria also said “it looks delicious.”

By the way, Jared was hunched over with his shoulders trembling again, and Keith sent a shocked look at me for some reason.

And so, just like that, the party was almost at its end before I noticed it.

Honestly, I’m really quite worried. As for why, it’s because I haven’t seen any sign that Maria was going to leave the party at all.

Rather, “I’m so happy that I’m able to be with Katarina-sama all day today” is what she said so happily next to me.

Why is it that you don’t have a capture target in mind, Maria..... Ah! Could it be that without me realizing it, you’ve gotten on the reverse harem route, and you’ll end up with everyone!

I've never cleared the reverse harem route, so I don't know the ending, but I seem to remember hearing from A-chan that Katarina would meet her destruction end there too.....

Ahh, which is it? Maria, is it the reverse harem, or have you decided on someone!

I'm so worried I'm so worried I'm so worried..... I waited and waited..... until finally.....

"Hey, Maria. Do you have someone you like?"

I asked her directly. At such a sudden question, Maria seemed badly surprised, and her cheeks gradually turned red.

"I, look up to and admire Katarina-sama."

She replied with the same response as usual as if it was natural.

".....Um, Maria. While I'm thankful for that, but..... That's not what I mean, do you have someone you're interested in, someone of the opposite gender that you want to be with? That's what I meant."

This time, I should make myself absolutely clear and hear her response.

".....Someone I'm interested in, that I want to be with..... of the opposite gender....."

Maria thought over and repeated my words, and I watched her with bated breath. Now, tell me clearly! Maria, which capture target do you want to be with?

".....There isn't one....."

".....Sigh....."

At Maria's answer, I involuntarily let out a sound of helplessness, and froze up. Eh? Huh? Did she just say she doesn't have anyone? While I was in a state of confusion, Maria continued in a clear voice.

“I don’t have anyone of the opposite gender that I’m interested in. The person that I’m interested in, and admire, and always want to be by, is Katarina-sama.”

As she said so, Maria took both of my hands.

“That’s why, from now on as well, please let me always be by Katarina-sama’s side.”

This line is something that I seem to have heard somewhere before.

Ahh. That’s right. This line was what the heroine said to the capture target at the very end. “From now on as well, please let me always be by your side,” as she took the hands of the capture target.

But, I wonder why she’s saying that to me.....

I didn’t understand the situation..... I’m even more confused. Another pair of hands reached out for my hands that were being held by Maria.

“Maria-sama, getting a head start on others isn’t allowed. I also want to be together with Katarina-sama forever.”

As she said so, Mary took my hands from Maria’s, and she smiled gracefully at me.

“Me, me too! Katarina-sama! Please, please allow me to be together with you forever!”

The face that appeared by Mary’s side was Sophia’s, who seemed to be quite excited as she said so.

“Then, me too. Within the limits allowed.”

Nico said so with his usual lack of an expression.

“If, if that’s the case, me as well!”

Alan came to the front as he said so as well.



“Everyone, what are you all saying? Katarina’s my fiancée.”

Jared calmly appeared, and immediately stole my hands away from Mary. Then right away, he also defended my hands from someone else’s hands that came out from the side.

“Prince Jared, I think I’ve said it many times before but, I don’t think my nee-san is suitable to become a prince’s bride. Please cancel the engagement. I’ll properly take care of my troublesome sister.”

Keith took my hands away from Jared as he said so.

Then, for some reason everyone around me started getting heated up.

“Keith. I’ve said this many times already but, I won’t cancel the engagement. Katarina will definitely become my princess.”

“Nope. Prince Jared, there’s no way I can let you monopolize my important sister all to yourself. I’ll definitely eliminate the engagement.”

“Indeed, in order for Prince Jared to not monopolize her, first, we have to get rid of this engagement. Keith-sama, I, Mary Hunt, shall lend you a hand.”

“That’s right. I hate the idea of Prince Jared having her all to himself. Mary-sama, please allow me to help as well. Onii-sama as well, please lend us your aid.”

“.....If you all say so.”

“Eh, if that’s the case I’ll help as well!”

“Me too, I’ll definitely be of help! By all means, please let me assist!”

“.....You’ve finally all started ganging up on me, how terrible. You all..... But I’ll never let any of you past me!”

Before I realized it, my hands that were taken by Keith had become free, but.....

Mmm, I have an incredible feeling of being in the middle of all this without being involved. I don't even know what everyone is talking about anymore.....

I even felt a bit lonely, as I looked at everyone who seemed to be having so much fun heatedly.

They really seemed to be getting along so well, but..... But I didn't see any signs of love among them..... If it had been the reverse harem route, the atmosphere should have been a little sweeter. In the first place, I feel like there's something off about the additions of Mary and Sophia here.

Even though I feel a little left out, but..... It doesn't seem like a destruction end for me.

While still being quite confused, I worked my head as desperately as I could.

Um~. This is..... This situation..... Probably..... Everyone becomes friends, the friendship end?

The friendship end, also known as the normal end. The heroine doesn't pick any capture target in particular, and everyone remains good friends. Since it's a romance game, and she wasn't able to pick anyone to be in love with, in some ways it's a bad end as well.

Why would Maria, tell me the line meant for a capture target, when in the previous world the friendship end that I had achieved had different lines and location.....

But even so, the way how everyone seemed so happy..... It really did seem similar to the friendship end that I've seen in my previous life.

In my mind, I had thought that there'd be no mistake that everyone would be madly in love with Maria. I mean, Maria is really, so lovely and gentle, and is easily embarrassed because whenever I look at her directly her cheeks will flush red, to the point where even I as the rival character would skip a heartbeat whenever I see her like that.

What's more, as for Jared and Keith, whenever I was sticking to Maria, they would often come and peel me off of her, and this was definitely evidence that their hearts had been stolen by Maria, and that they were jealous, is what I thought.

That's why, I had definitely thought that Maria would have someone, or even be with everyone in the end.

And yet..... Unbelievable, for it to be the friendship end.....

If it's the friendship end, no rival would receive any serious blows. I mean, everyone only ended up as friends after all.

Meaning..... I, Katarina Claes, won't have a destruction end.....

Together with the breath that I had been holding, all the tension seems to have left my body.

I relaxed quite a bit, and when I spied on my friends who seemed to be chatting so happily, it seemed like the party was about to end.

And thus, the graduation party ended. And..... the otome game "Fortune Lover" has concluded. It's an extremely unexpected end, but..... As for me, it's a really great end.

★★★★★★★★

After the graduation party finished, we headed for the student council room. Here the student council members plus me gathered, and there was supposed to be a mini party here to congratulate Nico.

Since the congratulatory party was right after the graduation party, it's enough to only have a few sweets and just a little tea.

This party isn't known to the other students of the school, but we also called the former student council president of the school over, Sirius Deek, also known as Rafael.

He seemed to be a bit timid at appearing before us, but everyone greeted him warmly. All the junior members had also prepared flower bouquets for him, and Rafael received them happily. But, when I presented him with my specially made vegetable bundle, just like Nico, he froze up for a bit. He's probably really surprised at my wonderful idea.

And so the student council members were all together for the first time in a really long time, and we all had a good time.

"Please go ahead, Katarina-san."

Rafael poured a cup of tea for me with a smile.

"Thank you very much."

I thanked him as I received it, and I sipped on the tea. The tea that I haven't tasted for so long was just the same as before, having a very gentle taste to it.

It seems that before, he had always prepared it for his mother who would always return home tired. Rafael's expression was very calm as he told me that story.

"Katarina-sama, if it's alright with you, please have something to eat as well."

Maria invited me to try some sweets as she said so.

"Wah, it looks even more delicious today. It's the first time I've seen this sweet though, is it also something Maria handmade?"

On the top of something that seemed like a fluffy sponge cake, it was covered in a lot of syrup, and just by looking at it, I was about to drool, and it's something that I've never seen Maria make before.

“Yes. It’s something new that I came up with. Together with my mother.”

“Wow, with your mother?”

“Yes. Since Katarina-sama said that you’re very pleased with the sweets I made, I thought that maybe you’d get bored if I always made the same things, so I thought up a new recipe together with my mother.”

“Is that so. I don’t think the day where I’ll be tired of Maria’s sweets will ever come, but I’m still very happy. Thank you. By all means, please tell your mother thanks from me as well.”

“Yes. I’ll tell her as well.”

As she said so, Maria smiled so happily.

I received the sweets that Maria made with the new recipe, and they were even more delicious than they looked, and I wasn’t able to stop myself anymore.

“Katarina..... If you suddenly eat that much all at once, you’ll upset your stomach again.”

“That’s right. Nee-san. During the graduation party, didn’t you also eat quite a bit more than other people? Don’t be too irresponsible.”

While I was lost in stuffing my cheeks with sweets, Jared and Keith caught my attention.

Mmm, both of them are looking straight at me. Almost just like my mother.

If I upset my stomach like this, they’ll definitely get angry at me. Jared would nag me with a smile on his face. Keith would get a long, troubled face.

There's no helping it. I guess I'll just save a little. I slightly slowed down the rate at which I was stuffing myself with sweets.

"Katarina-sama, I recently bought a new book series. Since it's a very nice story, please, let's read it together like before."

When I slowed my pace at stuffing myself with sweets slightly, Sophia invited me with some new romance novels. Any books that I would really like, she would always immediately lend to me. Mmm. I'm really so happy. And so, I got all fired up for talking about books.

"Katarina, I might not be able to meet you for a while but, I'll leave my sister in your care."

Nico asked me with his usual lack of an expression.

"No, no. It is I who should be saying I'll be in her care."

I smiled as I replied, and Nico's devilishly charming smile appeared. ....Mmm. It's really amazing how strong his charm is..... After many years of associating with him, I'm mostly immune to it, but my cheeks still became red involuntarily.

In this next year from now, I won't be seeing Nico much. I'll be lonely but, Sophia who loves her brother so much will be even more lonely.

"Onii-sama, please come visit at any time! If you spend a year out of the loop, you'll be defeated by the others!" and she asked him to come as frequently as he possibly could. Honestly, I didn't really understand what she meant in the second half there. But anyways, I understand really well that Sophia really loves her brother.

"Katarina-sama, next spring, what do you plan to grow in your field?"

After smiling at seeing Sophia's brother complex, this time it was Mary who spoke up.

That's right, it'll almost be spring. What shall I grow in the field this time. I wonder if I should try growing some new vegetables. Mmm. It looks like it'll be fun from now on as well.

Mary said "I'll help you again as well next time." With the help of Mary who has a green thumb, it's like having the power of a hundred.

".....The field is fine and all, but..... Whenever you enter your field covered in that, you should really stop and do something to change your appearance..... No matter how I look, all I can see is a middle aged farmer lady."

Alan said such a thing to me. To begin with, he's already said this to me several times over. Honestly, work clothes that are easy to move around in are the best for working in the field, but..... But if he keeps saying that I'll try to do something to improve my appearance.

".....I understand. I'll try what I can to improve my appearance."

Indeed, my work clothes are rather plain and in drab colors. It can't be helped that they make me look like a middle-aged lady.

Alright! Next time let's try using floral fabric for my work clothes!

Since my stomach was quite full, I moved a bit away from the table to the window, and rested my stomach.

Everyone seemed to be talking happily about something, and they were all relaxed. While watching everyone, I thought over everything that had occurred in these eight years.

Eight years ago, during my eighth birthday, I recovered my previous life's memories. And then, I noticed that this was an otome game, and what's more, that I had unluckily reincarnated into a noble girl villainess..... I had lamented so many times about my misfortune when I realized that.

However, when I look back upon what actually happened..... Things were completely different from the game.

Jared was supposed to be indifferent to Katarina, but he was always very kind to me and got along with me well.

Keith who was supposed to be avoiding Katarina, was together with me all the time, and helped me so much.

Even though they shouldn't have had anything to do with me, Mary, Alan, Sophia, Nico, and even Rafael, are all my irreplaceable precious friends now. And, even though she should have been my enemy originally, and the heroine who would bring destruction upon Katarina, Maria's also become my important friend.

"Katarina-sama, are you alright?"

Since I was holding my stomach while leaning on the windowsill, Maria seemed to be rather worried about me.

"I'm alright. Thank you, Maria."

Becoming the evil villainess Katarina Claes, how unlucky I was..... I had lamented how unlucky I was every day.....

But in the end, the destruction that I was so afraid of never came.

On the contrary, just like this, everyone cares about me, and are my wonderful friends that will help me out.

My magic is shabby, and I'm bad at studying, but they never forsook me, when it was difficult, or when it was painful, my irreplaceable, precious friends were always by my side.

Now, I can say it in a loud voice.

Having met all these wonderful people – I, Katarina Claes, am – such a very lucky person.



The warm sunshine coming in from the window told me that spring was almost here.

A new season was arriving without any otome game scenarios.

The End

### **Side story 8 – I was found out – Epilogue**

“Hey, Katarina. I’ve always been wondering but, what is that bulge in your pocket?”

I’ve avoided all the destruction flags, and I had been sipping tea while completely relaxed, when Jared suddenly pointed at my pocket, my hand went over to feel what it was.

Huh, what’s in here? What is it? I pulled out the item in my pocket.

It was, in my eight years, the greatest masterpiece among the toy snakes.

.....Come to think of it, last night, when I was preparing against the destruction flags, I had put it in my pocket, and I had completely forgotten about it..... What’s more, of all things, I’ve made the mistake of taking it out in front of Jared.....

Eight years ago, I had thrown a toy snake at Jared, and he exacted a terrible revenge upon me, and in order to guard against him, I had a toy snake made, and I had been careful to not let Jared notice my toy snake throwing practice. And yet..... Of all things, at such a timing..... Even though I had worked so hard to avoid the destruction flags..... At this rate a new destruction is going to come for me.....

I held the toy snake and froze up. I really didn’t have the courage to face Jared head on and see his expression. However, I was able to feel some kind of disturbing atmosphere.

.....This is bad. Somehow, I have to deceive him somehow.....

“.....Ah, ahh! What is this, when did it get there? Exactly who on earth put such a thing in my pocket?”

For the time being, let's go with the scenario where someone put it in my pocket unknowingly. Uh-oh, the words came out in a bit of a monotone but, I think it's a great idea.

This toy snake isn't mine, but someone else put it into my pocket as some sort of evil plot.

“Really, when did such a thing get in my pocket without me knowing it?”

I continued with my convincing performance..... Then.....

“It can't be, someone arbitrarily put it in there?”

Jared raised his voice in puzzlement. Looking at his face, it was just as stiff as his voice was. I, I've succeeded. I've deceived him successfully. My acting ability is quite something. At this rate, I might even become an actress in the future.

And so, I got completely carried away and continued my acting.

“T, that's right. Exactly who would do such a thing?”

I made a troubled look. I felt completely like a big-shot actress.

“Really now, I wonder who exactly would have put such a thing there, hmm?”

Jared's already been completely deceived by my wonderful acting. This is good, this is good. And so, just when I had become completely at ease.....

“- What exactly do you think you're talking about?”

“EH!?”

When I looked again, his expression and tone of voice had suddenly changed..... And the same evil smile that had been there when I had thrown the toy snake at him before was there again.

.....Huh? What? My sublime performance should have completely fooled him..... While my eyes became completely wide-eyed, Jared continued on indifferently.

“When you think about it normally, it should be impossible, something like putting an item into your pocket, without you noticing it at all. On top of that, doing something like this has no meaning at all.”

“.....Urgh, indeed.....”

I had thought it was a wonderful idea, but..... It’s indeed just as he said. As expected of the genius Prince Jared.

“In the first place, the only person that would be deceived by such a hilarious lie, would be Katarina.”

“.....”

“What’s more, you’ve always thought I didn’t know but, that Katarina’s been secretly making something and sneaking out to practice throwing it, I’ve discovered it long ago.”

“!?”

What’s this!? Even though I had thought that he never noticed..... It’s been completely exposed.....

“And so, why would Katarina have such a thing?”

Jared asked me with such a beautiful, beautiful smile.

“.....T, that’s.....”

Just in case, if the worst was to happen, it was to throw at you! But I can’t say that..... I froze up again.

“Well, I can get a general idea of what you were thinking, but..... What shall I do? Shall I report it to Duchess Claes again?”

“Eh, nooo, please just not that.....”

As that evil smile appeared on Jared’s face, I panicked. If mother finds out about this incident, a frightful thunderstorm would surely fall upon me again.

“Is that so..... In that case, if you listen to a request of mine, I’ll graciously forget about this incident.”

“Really!? I understand. I’ll do anything!”

This is great, I’m saved. In comparison to my mother’s thunder, I’ll listen to one or even two requests! To me who was excited, Jared moved his perfect face closer.

“Then tonight, without everyone else noticing, could you come up to my room by yourself?”

“Eh, uh..... Why?”

I had definitely thought that he would ask me something like taking notes for him, or making me buy bread at the store for him like an errand girl, but..... What exactly does he mean by visiting his room and making sure that everyone else doesn’t find out? I wonder if there’s some secret he wants to consult me about?

“You’ll understand the reason when you come. You’ll listen to any request I make, right?”

“.....Ah, yes.”

As expected, he must have something to discuss with me. I don’t know if I’ll be of any help, but I’ll do my best.

“I’ll be looking forward to your arrival.”

As he said so with his face close to my ear, he smiled profoundly. At that moment, for some reason shivers ran down my spine. Huh? What? I wonder why. Confused at the mysterious chills, I reached my hands out and stretched my body all over. I was suddenly surprised, and turned around to see Keith standing there.

“Prince Jared, you’re getting a little too close to her there.”

“Since Katarina is my fiancée, this much is normal. As for you, please don’t touch my Katarina too freely. Isn’t it about time that you left your sister? Keith Claes.”

Keith’s voice seemed a bit harsh for some reason, and Jared replied with his usual smile, but for some reason, rather than Keith, another voice replied.

“Katarina-sama doesn’t belong to Prince Jared. There’s no way that could be until the marriage has been officially concluded.”

Without me noticing it, Sophia had been standing in the trees with a grim face I’ve almost never seen her have, and then yet another different voice spoke up.

“That’s right. She’s just a fiancée right now, but who knows what could happen in the future.”

“What does that mean? Lady Mary Hunt.”

“Exactly what it sounds like, Prince Jared.”

To Mary who was grinning, Jared responded with a smile as well. They looked like they were happily discussing something, but..... I wonder why the atmosphere seemed so heavy.....

Before I realized it, all the student council members that should have been scattered about had gathered here around us, and everyone had grim faces for some reason.

And so, somehow, I felt like there was a disturbing atmosphere in the air. Huh? Why, all the destruction flags should have been gone now.....

“Katarina-sama, I believe your conversation with Prince Jared is over already, correct?”

“Eh, ah..... Mmm.”

I nodded at Mary’s words that seemed rather intimidating, and just like that, it feels like I was pressured into it.

And so, being sandwiched tightly between Mary and Sophia and Maria after that, I enjoyed chatting and having tea with them. Before I realized it, that mysterious chill had disappeared. I wonder what that was. That shivering feeling..... I wonder if I’m coming down with a cold?

And so, in the end, everyone kept an eye on me and I didn’t go visit Jared that night after all. And, I was scolded that I was never to do a thing like that from now on.

Well, indeed, as a noble daughter, visiting a boy’s room late at night, is considered a breach of etiquette. Next time, I’ll just discuss with him about what he wanted during the day.

But anyways, even though the destruction flags should have been gone..... Is it just my imagination that there seems to be a disturbing atmosphere amongst my friends.....